THE WATERMARK

A Journal of the Arts • University of Massachusetts • Boston

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A B O U T ~ T H E ~ W A T E R M A R K

OUR NAME

The Watermark succeeds *Howth Castle* as UMass Boston's journal of the arts. Many people have asked us about the name change. *Howth Castle* was a fine name, but its meaning, origin (from James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*), and most importantly, its connection to all of us, became lost over time. *The Watermark* applies to our harbor community and writing and art more readily. A watermark can be found on high quality paper; it can refer to tidal change; it can be the mark left by a bottle or cup of coffee on a cheap eats place mat—you get the idea. The point is that "watermark" has many definitions and people use it and think of it in different ways.

JOIN OUR STAFF

A journal like *The Watermark* is not an easy undertaking, as any of the staff can vouch for. The rewards, however, are immense. *The Watermark* provides a chance for students here not only to publish their work, but to become involved in the planning and production of a major publication.

We will be holding elections for many of the open positions on the journal, including editorships and business positions and in some cases can offer work-study funding and possible credit. *The Watermark* is on its way up. Now is a great time to join the staff. We urge anyone interested in joining our staff to contact us at (617)-287-7960, or stop by. We are located on the fifth floor of McCormack Hall, room 407.

SUBMIT YOUR WORK

If you are interested in submitting work for the upcoming edition of *The Watermark*, give us a call for information at 287-7960, or stop by. We are located on the fifth floor of McCormack Hall, room 407. General guidelines follow:

All submissions should include a cover sheet which can be found at our office, or simply put you name, address, title and type of work, student ID#, and phone # on a piece of paper and attach that to the work. Your actual submission should have only your student ID# on it.

Written work (fiction, poetry, plays, non-fiction, essays, humor, etc.) should be typed, double spaced and 4500 words at most.

Artwork (prints, line drawings, collages, paintings, computer art, etc.) should be submitted in photograph form.

If any of this presents a problem, contact us; we can work with you.

E D I T O R ' S ~ N O T E

About a year ago I felt older, tired and more disillusioned with the human condition than I had in a good time. *The Watermark* has changed much of that. After reading nearly five-hundred poems, eighty-five works of fiction and play writing, forty essays and looking at over one-hundred and sixty pieces of artwork, I have found a new appreciation for the life around me.

This college of ours has always struck me as remarkable—a fusion of worldwide interests and constituents, intertwined with academia and the determination to further productive lives. But *The Watermark* has provided that last link in my understanding of what happens here. It is one thing to benefit from sitting in a classroom discussing Middle Eastern peace accords flanked by native Palestinians and Jews. It is another to see South African leaders speaking at our commencement, knowing their words and landmark meeting will save lives. All of this matters.

On a personal level, though, *The Watermark* succeeds by presenting the creative work from those within our community. The following pages contain weeks, months and in some cases years of crafting by the people who sit next to you in class, brush by you in the hall and squeeze behind you onto the bus. These pages are not static conversation; they are pieces of animate life, shaped by different heritages, backgrounds and thoughts. But every work shares at least one commonality—a UMass student created it.

From the start of this project our staff aspired to deliver a journal that would be representative of our campus. Because of their hard work, your great submissions and assistance from various members of the UMB community, *The Watermark* achieves this goal.

When I think about where to begin thanking people, I realize how much poorer this journal would have been without the help of so many. I have been humbled throughout this long process and hope that I have forgotten to thank no one and hope further that if I have, they'll forgive me.

Neal Bruss affirmed that it "can be done;" Ron Schreiber provided invaluable advice based on his experience with Hanging Loose Press. And the efforts of professors and students who spread the word about *The Watermark* have not gone unnoticed.

Thanks to everyone who submitted work.

Thanks also go to the Student Senate, the Art, English and Anthropology Departments, The Harbor Gallery, Central Duplicating, Transportation, Shirley Musto, C.C., Paul Paquin and the offices of the Chancellor and Provost. Carol Arsenault designed our logo and put up with our annoying phone calls.

Special thanks go to Atha Demopolous and the staff of *The Mass Media*. Finally, Donna Neal, our Student Life advisor, deserves more than acknowledgement for her patience and her expertise with eleventh hour dealings.

—KG

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CATHERINE'S SAP

Johnny Shivers bought it
with a .38 slug
that didn't have his name on it
but bought him all the same.

When the Blues found him
in his pussy orange
fin-tailed El Dorado
the meter read: Expired
and what was left of Johnny
trickled crimson
from the car into a thirsty drain.

A parking ticket flapped under the windshield.
Johnny's last marker.
Twenty-five bucks the city would never see.

Johnny's wallet was left on him
loaded like a history lesson in green.
Also his driver's license, a tin of Sheiks, track times,
a picture of the Splendid Splinter
and my calling card.

I hated losing clients
before I even met them.

When the Blues found me
they followed a visit from Johnnie Walker Black
and a pack of stampeding Camels.

The two I got were carbon copies of themselves
poured from the same mold cops had come from for years.
They had Downtown written all over them.
I had bars written all over me.

Steady luck cleared my alibi faster than my head
and my hard fought truce
with the metal cot and itchy army covers
went for nothing.

I was sprung by a key monkey
who spit out "Habeus Corpus" and "lawyer"
like they were dirty words.
Any other day
I would have agreed with him.

Rubbing rust from my palms
I collected my wallet, keys, revolver and lint,
blew a cloud of smoke at the gently napping desk Sgt.
and cleared the doors.

On the way down the stairs
a vanilla vampire with sunglasses
attached herself to my arm
and introduced herself as Ms. Catherine Shivers.

Ms.
As if she had been saying it for years.

I let her have me for breakfast.
Bottomless black coffee,
gray ashes,
questions.

She showed me a wedding picture,
her and Shivers,
dark gambling shadows
under the happy couple's eyes.
A backdrop of red Vegas velvet,
pink plump satin pews,
plastic wedding bells.
The usual.

"Why me?" I asked.
"Hadn't Johnny contacted you?"
Her eyes burned red behind the glasses.
Maybe it was the reflection of our cigarettes.
"Never had the pleasure," I said.
She grimaced like I hit her.

Her story was insurance problems.
A lot of dough was waiting
on the cops closing the case.
She didn't want to wait that long.

"Will you..."
play the sap she wanted to know.
But the snow curve of her neck,
white bridge to her collar bone
and the valley and peaks of the rest
had already made me one.

At a Jefferson and Grant a day
plus expenses,
I wasn't cheap.
She spread a week on the table before me,
crossed her legs creating gridlock at the register,
and eased her long back against the booth.
I paid for breakfast.

Deep in the rackets
deep in the numbers
deep in the booze
and deep in the hole
Johnny was no angel.
Not down here at least.

Shivers' story read like a greasy road map
through bad neighborhoods and sleazy two-bit joints,
his name engraved on street corners,
back alleys and dead ends.
Strictly a short story in a city of dime store novels.

Johnny was small-time but known.
Known but not Made.
An independent contractor.
A man of many acquaintances;
mostly the cutting type.

Shivers had few friends
and less mourners.
He exited this world
sooner than a few sharks would have liked.
I left them hungry and circling,
searching for new misery.

The new Ms. Shivers
I learned
was once a budding employee of J. Shivers Inc.,
an authentic winter
up and down.
"Creamy" and "Willing" I heard twice
under oath and blackjack.
If you had the coin.

She also had a sister.
Word had it that for the right price
Snow White would visit you twice
at the same time.
Fingering the money in my pocket
I brown bagged some rye in a hurry.

Two talk show material junkies
and one heavily tipped doorman later
I located the residence of one Pamona Larke.
But no Pamona home.

Luckily her landlord was talkative and thirsty;
not necessarily in that order.
Said she vamoosed a full month earlier.
Paid her rent then vanished.
Poof!
Pink Elephants.

He showed me a picture he found in her trash.
Catherine and Pamona.
"Trouble, mister...?"
I smelled double trouble.

When Ms. Shivers came into my office
her lips were blood ripe,
a fox was napping across her shoulders
and a leopard had gained some brand new curves.
I shrugged under my holster.

When I asked her about her sister
Catherine sounded like Cain
and hissed like his mother's tempter.
The leopard dropped in a heap to the floor.
Shameless.

It wasn't enough.
But it was damn close.

When Catherine–
Mrs. Shivers
washed ashore,
there was nothing I could do anyway.

When the Blues came for Pamona
they barely beat Metropolitan Life to the door.

OF WATER

You were in the kitchen,
I could hear you from the next room,
the water running
your cigarette burning,
breathing,
my eyes were closed like yours
as you washed your face.

A long time passed before I lifted my head
to see that the water had seeped through
the plaster walls between us.
I knew how you would look
when I found you,
the way I knew that you had
kept your eyes closed for too long.

Naked, floating above the stove
in seven feet of water,
as still as that photo of the burning boy.
The water still running and
everything hovering on the surface like toy boats,
but you're asleep, just asleep,
and I am almost sure the water will evaporate.

FAMILY STORY:
YOU FALL ASLEEP IN THE ROAD

Hey Lise, I was just
thinking of you, I was
holding up a package of seeds,
it was indian yellow, the color
of pollen—holding it up
to the light and turning
it around so they'd fall like stones
through the garden on the front.
The package reads:

AMERICAN
flower garden
mixture

(Then there's the garden picture.)

American flower garden? Mixture?
I turn the package around and
around, hundreds of black stones
go tumbling down the garden path,
and the little wooden fence
and all the American flowers
getting crushed and withering brown,
but then they're not stones—ants!
Hundreds of tiny black ants
falling over each other in the garden.
I put the package down.

I put it down.
Put it down.
Dawn, 1976—the math puzzles me.
You tip-toe down the path through
the American garden toward the road
and find an ant-hill. Hundreds of ants
tugging stones up the hill,
eternally tugging stones up the hill.
You nose—inches from the ground.
Each ant—a Martian Sisyphus,
not alarmed by the enormous face.
And that is how they found you, asleep.

MAMA'S BREAST

I cup it with two hands,
its silicone jelly quivering
within a smooth polyester shell,
and hold its weight to my cheek.
The small artificial nipple brushes
against my bone, a silver safety pin
dangles from where Mama tacked it
inside her white brassiere.
I close my eyes to see the scar that turned
and puckered across her ribs, looking
every bit like her heart had sprouted,
its apex straining to bud.

In the vanity drawer there is a tangle
of slips and lace underwires, silk chemises
and panties signed "Dior". I crush them
into the corners, to bare the scented
liner: paper printed with cabbage roses,
in areola pinks and reds. That's where
I set it finally — the perfect arc of Mama's breast
rises from the manufactured hairs and veins
of roses.

AT THE EYE

This job is gonna make me go queer.
I used to love to dance, the big costumes
kind of burlesque, professional, you know?
I started at nineteen, got off being on stage.
Drank more fuckin' scotch, made more money
collecting tips from losers lookin' for better

than the woman they had at home — better
to believe there was some mystery in sex, queer
as that may sound. Christ! All the secrets money
can buy, chicks like me, without any costumes,
takin' one good stretch, our unclosed legs, the stage
trashed with dollars and tens sometimes; to know

in one more night the rent'll be paid. You know
they always ask why you do it. They say, "You're better
than this." But they never take their eyes off the stage
when you go to expose the deep soft folds queer
to girls. They don't cover you, tell you to put the costumes
back on. They love to fantasize your surrender, the money

is no object, believe me. And if they don't have money
they usually want to marry you. Just to let you know
you could have a "normal" life, where the only costumes
are prissy outfits from the neighborhood mall. I'd better
get ready — I'm up next. Frankie's tendin' tonight, queer
as anything and gorgeous, I'm safe with him backing my stage.

He really watches out for me, I'm getting to the stage
where I don't trust anybody. I was always lendin' money
to girls, for an abortion, a guy or a fix but I don't go for queer
shit like that anymore. Now it's my business to know
what people want. Every time I'm out there I get better
at knowing. Get me buzzed, I'll twitch my ass, peel costumes

off stitch by stitch, something black, tight and leather. Costumes
like corsets with long, long laces and I can smoke that stage.
Oh, there are females that think they can do me one better.
I've even seen chicks piss in a champagne glass for quick money.
I've got limits to what I'll do for a man, customers'll never know.
"Hey, Frankie is it time? What's that your shirt says, Queer

Nation?" His other one's better. It says, "We're here, we're queer."
I gotta go, the stage is mine, the place is packed. You know
those big costumes were somethin'... really worth the money.

THE OLIVE SUEDE SHOES

for Sharon, dying of AIDS

Italian, of course —
anyone could see that.
A fluent line from heel
to instep, spatulate until
the taper of a tiny cone-like
seam at the front. Leather
supple as a tongue. Stringy tasseled
laces that would snap against
your ankle, tone against tone:
olive, espresso-and-milk.

Now, when you go to wear
them, the heel bed shrinks away
from your skin. Your toes rattle
in the box. Too loose to walk,
in one step your feet are onto
bare floor. The soles unscuffed.
You fill each with wadded tissue,
wrap both in brown paper
to keep them clean, and give them
to me, as if you always knew
we were the same size.

THE CHILD OF THE LAND

There was a lovely child that often went forth
And the salient objects she looked upon,
She became of them and they of her.

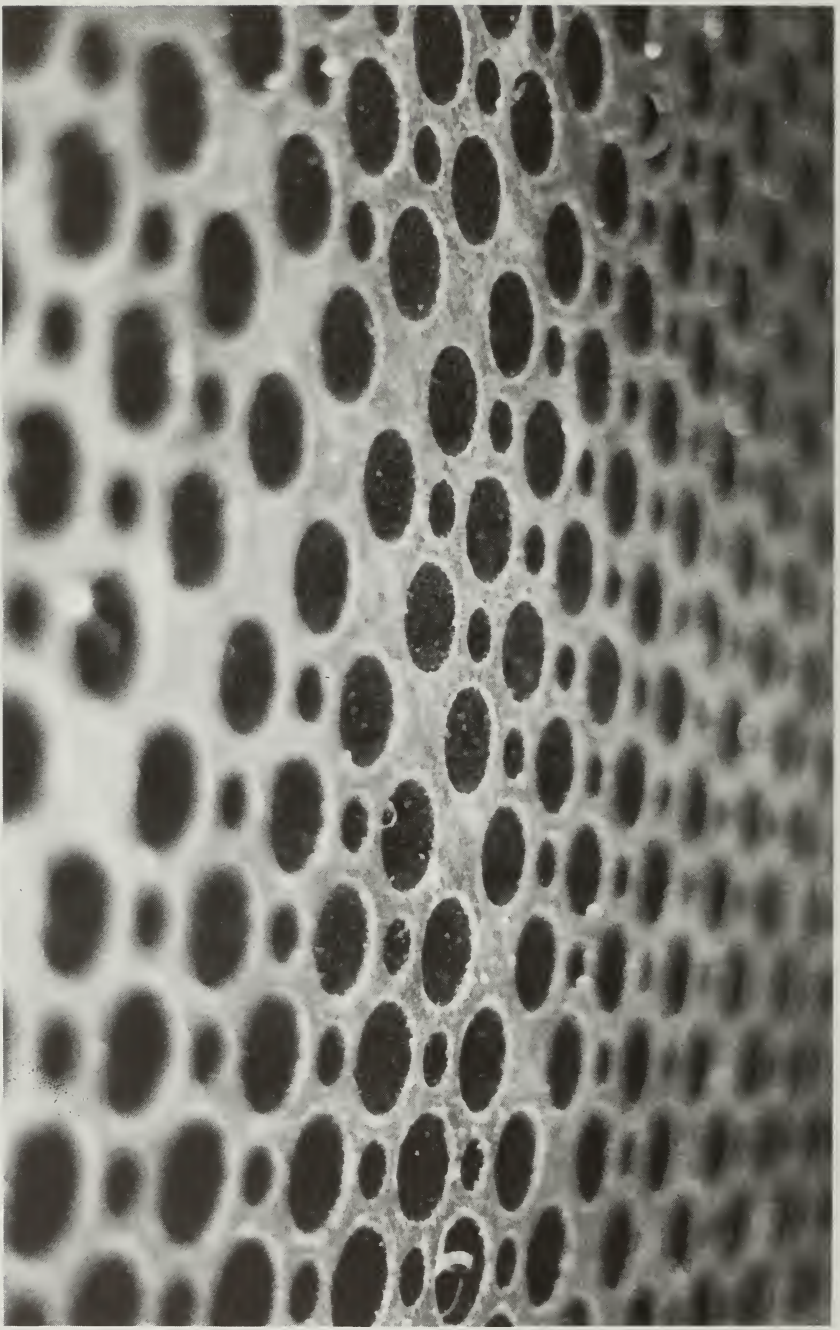
The monstrously huge pyramids became a part of this child
And the dust, and the stones, and the heat, and the people,
And pharaohs dead in their coffins,
And the Sphinx with its human head and lioness body,
And the cream-colored camels with their arched backs and vacant eyes
And the dark graveyards in the three-dimensional triangles,
And the dirty white mummies lying, forever sleeping in their coffins,
And the curiously peering eyes of the tourists,
And the farmer's daughters with their dark veils and mysterious eyes,
And the hunger-stricken beggars using the dirt as comforting pillows
All of which she became of them and they of her.

And the burdens of the Nile,
From the mournful crying in it,
And the people washing in it,
And the boats carrying tourists in it,
And the singer who died from it,
And its dam trying to stop the water from forcing it to burst into tears,
All of which she became of them and they of her.

And the gentle, golden sparkling water of the peninsula,
And the magnificently colored fish of red and blue and green and
gray and white and purple and gold that swam about,
And the beautiful white sand particles delicately imitating the waves,
And the rich pebbles and stones lying about,
And the bright seashells and nautiluses sleeping at the bottom,
And the other children playing,
All of which she became of them and they of her.
All of which she is of them and they of her.

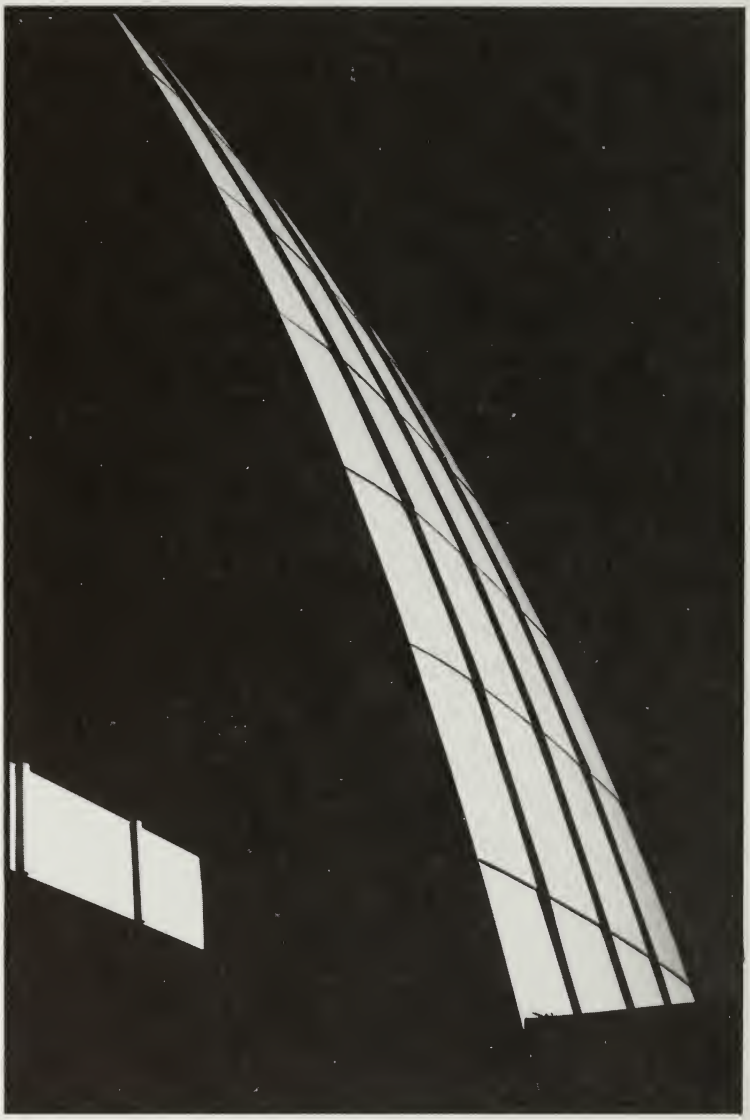
SAM • RAPPAPORT
UNTITLED

IVAN • BRENS
PACIENCIA



MICHAEL • GRANEY
BENDING~WITHOUT~BENDING

JEFF • WALLS
UNTITLED



JOHN • CATRAMBONE • JR
UNTITLED

LORENA • TURNER
UNDERSTANDING~GEOMETRY # 5

MUSEUM

I remember sneaking
into the blackness of clouds
I couldn't see the sculpture
a cup of milk spilling
down then frozen
in her shape
don't listen to a word

I imagined she came to life and we went to a dumb cafe

where she smoked long cigarettes
leaving lipstick smeared on the butt
and took small sips of coffee
from a painted paper cup
which she'd lick to stop from dripping
and grab when
feeling down

AVANT-GARDE!

Art is Evil period
Avant hyphen Garde exclamation

Posing
Ministers of
Righteous
Conceit anagram

See the whites of those colon
gothic slash bohemian slash
slackers slash soothsayer slash period

my 5th hyphen crying muse crawling
in the trenches gripping the badge of Honor period

static
chaos
static

censor
religious
statues

biased
dementia
agnostic

hiss

ss

ss

symbolism period

BURDENS

(R.S.V.P.: Inform us please as to the likelihood of a visit to the shower.)

--5 months ago...

Dinah finds out that her sweet princess got knocked up. Poor, poor Dinah wanted to raise her child right, but Matty is still an infant. (Though she'll argue the fact.) She'll refrain on how she has lived. Just to break her mother's back (and pride) by going against the type. Hunting for men "on the run..." Though now, according to Dinah, Matty has become

...a hit and run, with my little girl being the victim and left betrayed. Everyone just stares passively by... Nobody gives a damn anyhow.

This victim did love gambling (taking after her long gone father), and played the cards as often as possible (two of a kind, she might have thought), with her men. But, burning time and liquor is like getting too deep into sin. (Losing hands...full house divided.) Matty sighs in reflection...

It seemed so right...if for just one night?!

—3 weeks left until...

It took Dinah and Matty two weeks to find a name. (But it probably didn't take as long for her to end up that way?) She wanted to name the child Hank (after the daddy), but Dinah didn't want to hex the child! Eventually, they decide on Barry. (Dinah likes the name for another reason...)

—14 days...

Two more weeks until the celebration...of morning sickness, confusion, cramps, delirium, and anxiety. Urges for food some might not consider a delicacy, (of course, beyond the passe and rote "pickles and ice cream"). Matty prefers salmon covered in whipped cream with fudge and Cajun pepper. Dinah suggests a more civil cuisine...

The days become more frantic, as the complaining seems to occur even in her sleep. But, she has learned new hobbies and habits (especially with a favoring of prescription drugs). A good day is hearing dear Dinah complain only twice every hour and taking the Lord's name in vain every other hour. (Of course, this is an ideal day.) Dinah is supporting her only child in grand illustration, with a shower that is near to a Bar Mitzvah in resemblance, which...

needs invitations, invitations that are like subpoenas especially if the father is missing!

Matty does find Dinah not taking this all too kosher. Once, Dinah remarked in a most candid fashion (rare for a figure respected in her community...)

This is just perfect, Matty...this is just insane! Can't you do better than this?! Can't you find this...this schmuck?! Was he that bad of a...?

Matty sighs in disgust, promising she might overdose on Lithium...

Jesus Christ, mother! Jesus! Christ! You make me sick! Hypocrite!

Dinah retorts back...

Matty, please don't say 'Jesus!' I went to Temple just last week! You know I don't like going...gimme a pill!

—6 days left

Everything is finalized...almost. The subpoenas (rather...), the invitations were mailed. A band was hired to perform, and Neil might drop in...(Dinah, though, is really taken with Barry Manilow...)

But, he is a real snob. Maybe if we called the baby 'Mandy,' he might stop in?

—2 days later...(7 o'clock in the morning)

The baby is early! The baby is early!!

The princess and prima donna scatter around the townhouse like Brooklyn rats. The two ballerinas skip in double-time down Park Avenue trying to steal a taxi. Dinah lures an innocent immigrant with the flash of green bills from her jeweled hands (and, of course, her quaint and feminine screeching.)

Dinah bribes the Spanish/Armenian with a 50, ordering...

To the clinic, Omar!! Hurry!! We'll name the kid after you, it you get there quick!

The cabbie smiles, and tells Dinah...

My name, madam, is Amad...Amad-ras-va-adajeus...

Dinah regrets...

Fine, fine...maybe if they're twins? We'll cut that name and give each one a half!!! Let's go!!

They race through backstreets managing to: almost lose the baby and Dinah's teeth, kill a wino, and a Manhattan advertising executive...

—16 hours later...

After the war...there was peace. After the love was gone...there was regret. And after Matty's drugs wore off...there was Dinah requesting some for herself. Through the marathon of executive moaning and pain, a pinkish-red frame of a boy was released!

...No twins!!

What a historic day for this *All-American* (Express) family. The new mother and child lay snug in their waterbed while visions of Dinah dancing on tables at the shower, singing "Cherry, Cherry" resound in their heads. The world is a much safer and better place. Dinah said it best...

"Please! It could be worse! Imagine—two jews named after an Armenian cabbie!"

The same night (in Canada, somewhere...)

Good ole Hank is gearing for a new sweetie in the Motel 6. She strolls out of the bathroom, smiling, and toweled-dry. Hank has the shades drawn and country music playing...She, the innocent sweetie, speaks...

Hank, oh, Hanky boy! Where have you been all my life? It's funny, if you don't mind me saying so, but...I really can't tell that you're Jewish?!

Hank laughs, showing his two missing teeth; saying...

Dah-lin! Looks can be awe-flea' decevin'!!

HAND-SEWING

I stitched my breakfast
crumbs into the pillowcase
while you broke cotton . . .

You were a midwife
a healer

shook out-of-sleep
by neighbors at night wartime scuttled
to cold-floor houses to bedrooms with no lamps

to deliver

she wakes up bending
until she is lint

she dreams she is lapis
waiting like a th *teeth cut*

in her tongue

silk —

That day hand-sewing you told me about blue
babies and last-breath sighs how you can feel a body lighten as it heaves

out its soul

SHE SAT STRAIGHT IN HER CHAIR LIKE A WOMAN IN A CAST

It is fresh April. My house bleeds 9s, smoke. The fringe of cotton night gown slaps my bare ankles. . . a recurring dream.
I fill a white coffee mug with water.

—*I told him if he doesn't change I'm gonna leave.*
She sat straight in her chair like a woman in a cast. Carmen's eyes were clear and lined. The air-conditioning in Billy Tse's had just began to cool us.
Quiet
like dead rabbits.

he beaded her pearls
with strands of peas

The kitchen scatter rug is orange and beige and brown.

FINISHING

The tide of grain is frozen in its moment of ebb
as shellac rolls over it,
suffocating the pores.

"So smooth," everyone says. "Like glass."
They glide their fingers over the top,
leaving oily prints.

I get a clean rag to wipe away the dust,
but the dust doesn't go away.
It collects.

ALL DAY POEM

a man in nothing but pink shorts kicks
a candlepin bowling ball to a man
in blue shorts and black socks who
tosses it back and they go
back and forth, back and forth.
my fingers wiggle the pencil
sharpener and they go back and
forth fast or slow. i make them go
fast or slow. i do. i don't
write a poem all day because
my pencil sharpener is a television.

HER SISTER DIED BUT

chose not to go
away, staying

by her side, every
so often whispering

sometimes life *isn't fair*

in breath that within
a week reeked like

the August the algae
choked Pillings Pond

and all the sunfish
floated into the cattails.

her sister sat by her,
almost transparent,

attaching

herself to her
skin just a month after

her death. her sister
became a shadow

which hung off her
on the cloud

iest of days.
the shadow became

a glow she showed
at dusk, leading

neighbors to speak
faintly and a general

resurgence of prayer.

and every so often her
sister whispered
sometimes

life just isn't *fair.*

after nine months
of their whispering

Siamese existence,
she gave up denial

and admitted for
the first time hurrying

past the Center
Congregational Church

the day after Palm
Sunday—
the apparition

was no apparition. now

whenever her
sister whispered

life is never *fair*, she

asked her w*ho*
is life and what
was ever fair?

H E R ~ S I S T E R ~ D I E D ~ B U T

she atonaled
questions

to her sister,

crossing Main
Street or in Gates'

Apothecary or
in the doorway

of Gates'
going
in or going out.

neighbors passing

through the doorway
passing her would

talk but
no one
talked in front

of her for they all

had seen the glow

which even by
the sixteenth month

lasted all night and
hung about her

in the frost of December
mornings.
when she

died, the day before
the second remembrance

of her sister's death,
the neighbors spoke

without hesitation
but not before

Jacksons' Chevrolet
hearse drove down

Chestnut Street to
the end of Summer

to the Protestant
cemetery (where

every pallbearer swore
under his breath

how greater
she weighed than she

had ever looked
in the days when she

had three roosters
and all her hens with

all their eggs) and even
the Sullivan twins who

had just turned three
in honey-spotted

dresses threw
snapdragons

because they all
had seen the glow.

THE EAST IS PINK

...each morning not know where I lay
on map above the world hang
and dawn is split where I wake
with old war-trumpet recording play

full shout chant clear to me reach
through my shortwave student drill
their country here color in in pink
in half an hour I've gone to teach

down daily street I ride through dust
against rush of old army truck
and shiny bicycle round me press
my mercator map that I don't trust

for class where student meet my eye
and question about my army day
'because man like war' he say
not me I reply but then I can't explain

M A R A • K L E I N

ON WAITRESSING AND THE MIND/BODY PROBLEM

Okay, okay. As a terminally ill person, I was lying in my room at Mass General one day lamenting the fact that my imminent and unavoidable death was putting a damper on my as of yet unobtained goals (not to mention my social life!), when in burst a team of incredibly advanced psychologists, neurosurgeons, and physiologists to tell me not to despair. They (with the help of the government's last known research grant) would make a new physical entity in which they would place my identity. All that remained was for me to decide which philosophical (the closest to secular that these stiffs would get) approach to preserving my mental states would result with the "real me" still intact. I was left with a stack of readings on interactive dualism, philosophical behaviorism, the identity theory, and functionalism, and told to choose the best route to take by morning. Little did I know how little I did know....

The first thing I realized was that to understand each of the views I'd have to place myself in the hypothetical world presented by each theory in turn. As an interactive dualist I was no longer lying in bed. I could have been in a bed in a hospital but had no proof that my senses weren't deceiving me. In fact, I wasn't even sure that I had a body. All I knew for certain was that I was thinking about these things, but could in no way logically connect my mind (and states thereof) to my brain and body. While my mind has been known to causally interact with my brain, the actual "mind" does not exist in any physical manner, and therefore cannot be attached to me. More important, this would make it impossible for my mental states to be reassigned to any type of inorganic new body that my team of specialists might whip up. There seemed to be no way in which this theory allowed for the assignment of a particular state of mind to a particular physical being. I realized that my being an interactive dualist would make this operation an expensive failure. Besides, I didn't like the idea of my mind floating around in open space. I like to think of my mind as my own. Next.

In theory, it would be very easy for my team to transfer me via logical behaviorism; in practice this would extensively damage my mental states. It would be rather easy to make the switch. All they'd need to do would be to watch and take note of my reactions to any given situation and my responses to any given question. Choices of body would be multiple, for this observable output could be programmed into an android (or even a floppy disk) just as easily as it could be into a human being, because, to a logical behaviorist, mental states (beliefs, emotions,

desires, etc.) are really behaviors. The problem with this theory is that as a neurotic depressive with a martyr complex, I often feign emotions and hide the way I feel. I can frown when I'm happy and can definitely look and act happy when I'm not. My "profession" also calls for my observable states to contradict my inner thoughts. For instance, when a snobby yuppie couple allows their kid to throw linguine all over the floor of the white-tablecloth restaurant that I wait tables at, I smile and say "Have a nice night and come again," when what I really mean (behind my best super-waitress smile) is "If we ever see you heading this way again, we're locking the front door." While it might be nice to have the team program my regularly cheerful external side into my new body, this would erase my dark side, give me a new set of mental states, and change my personality. Not quite what I was looking for.

The identity theory was the most scientific of the theories, but as science cannot always explain mental states I rejected this theory for the project. According to the identity theorist, mental states are brain states. To preserve my brain states (and my identity) we would need only to record which physical state within my central nervous system is identical to which mental state, and transfer the pattern of neural firings that results from this relationship into a new brain and body. While this theory sounds perfectly reasonable, I'm not willing to trust my personal identity to a group of theorists who tell me that my mental states are in truth caused by a group of neural firings that they can't define yet. What happens to my personality in the interim while the brain scientists of the future try to figure out which firings to "program" into my new brain? And, as with interactive dualism, the identity theory leaves no room for a non-brained object (such as an alien or a computer) to have mental states.

Finally comes the view that I decided to accept to save my existence. As a functionalist, I believe that mental states, events, and processes (i.e. emotions and actions) are "functional" states of the brain, meaning that my external perceptions lead to internal beliefs. These cause a chain reaction of mental states (as in I perceive that I'm in a room, I believe that I'm in the room, I don't like the room, I desire to leave the room, I walk to the exit. If asked, I will say that I'm in the room, but want to leave). These interacting mental states act as a type of flow chart of the brain's activity. While this theory might seem similar to that of a behaviorist, there are differences. One is that, as a functionalist, I believe that my mind states can (potentially) exist without my brain. They can be completely characterized in terms of their causal relations to input/output behavior. All the team needs to

insure that I maintain my identity is to make certain that my memory remains intact, as my memory is what links my mental states over time. What my mind/brain is made of has nothing to do with how it works; therefore, I can choose any type of new body I want.

There are other aspects of functionalism that make it more appealing than the other theories. I can easily dismiss interactive dualism as I just don't like the idea of having (or sharing) a mind that aimlessly floats around in an invisible non-location. Functionalism combines some of the better qualities of the other theories. It states that a mental state "is the set of causal relations it bears to 1) environmental effects on the body, 2) other types of mental states, and 3) bodily behavior." (Churchland 283). While the behaviorist only uses what we observe externally to determine mental states, the functionalist believes that the definition of a mental state involves a network of causally connected internal states, which may lead not just to a particular outward show of that mental state (i.e. a smile or frown), but possibly instead to a decision to outwardly display a false or misleading mental state. A good example of this would be the palace guards in England. I can't believe that all those poor guys are permanently stoic and silent. There is also a marked difference between functionalist and identity theories. While both believe that mental states are related to brain activity, the type of activity varies greatly. While the identity theorist relies on the actual human brain receiving all the necessary (but mostly unknown) neural firings, the functionalist believes in an internal causation that is dependent on memory and information, but not upon the solid human brain. Although it is argued that this makes people "only as good as their memories," I have no problem with this. If something is important enough to be remembered, either I will remember it, or someone else will remind me of it in such detail that I'll recollect. It seems much easier to transfer my memories to another body, brain, or what have you, than it does to transfer undetermined neural firings or often false outward expressions.

So now it's been decided (it's morning now). The team is going to take my memories and transplant them into a new physical "body." I told them that the type of body (be it organic or artificial in composition) could be their choice so long as it's basically human (I thought about being a computer before I remembered how much I hate them) and am now waiting for the anesthetic to take hold. As I begin to drift off an idea pops into my head—what would happen if my brain and body somehow recovered? Medical technicians have been baffled by miracle recoveries before. What

if it happened after my memories had been transplanted? Would there be two of me? If not, then which person would be the "real" me? I suppose the interactive dualist would say that since our minds are all floating around in a communal manner, it's possible that other people are already sharing what I consider to be "my" mind. Why, then, should it bother me to share it with myself?

The logical behaviorist would agree that both entities would be me - as long as both bodies responded with physical action to mental states in exactly the same way that "I" had been observed to react. I disagree with this. My old (pardon me, former) body could be a good mimic without actually being me. The identity theorist would say that the new me would be me since my old body would have been relieved of all the unnamed gizmos that cause the neural firings that make me who I am. Even on this issue, functionalism wins my vote. I (meaning my mental self) would be in my new body and my old body would be like an old prom dress - an empty shell. Seeing it would bring back a few memories, but I'd have traded it in for a newer model. The importance of being me (as a functionalist) is the flowchart of my mind's networking. Where my mind/memory goes, so do "I."

Sources

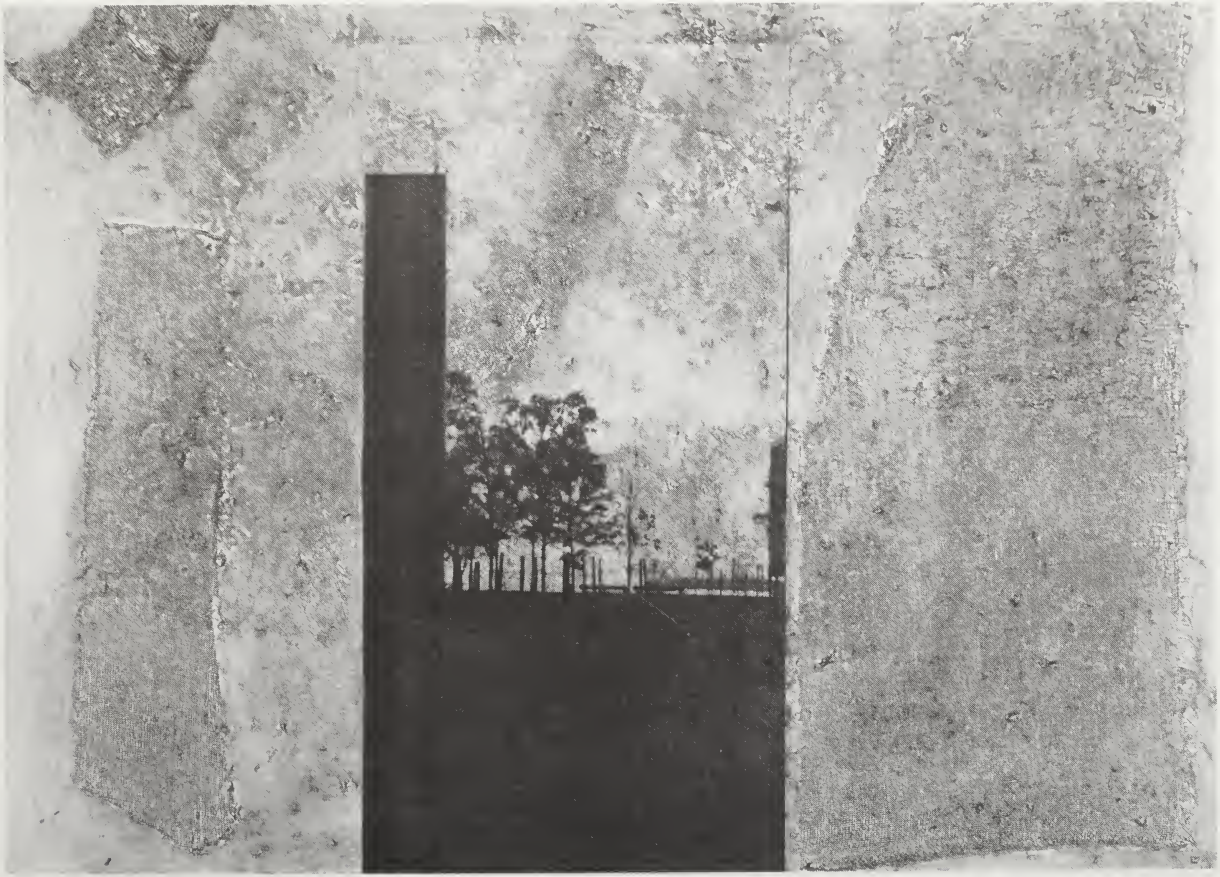
Churchland, Paul M., "Behavioralism, Materialism, and Functionalism," taken from Reason and Responsibility. Joel Feinburg, ed., (Belmont, CA.: Wadsworth, Inc. 1965)

SAM • RAPPAPORT
UNTITLED

LUIS • BRENS
UNTITLED

JEFF • WALLS
UNTITLED

MARIKA • HOVING
PORTRAIT~OF~WAYNE
(MISSION~HILL)



LUIS • BRENS
EN~UN~CIUDAD~
DIFERENTE

JULIE • M • BAKER
PUBLIC~RELIEF~IN
QUINCY~MARKET

DIANA • WOEBCKE
SEDONA~SNOWFALL

JEFF • HOVIS
UNTITLED

A POET'S PRAYER

Subtle me to sleep;
I want lullabies pressed
into my palms.
Let me remember my last taste
of daylight
through shuttered eyes;
let me recall your voice
in silence.

Subtle me to sleep;
I want no vivid dreams this evening.
Let me recognize the smell
of thunder
in distant echoes; let me learn
the language of passion
in its absence.

Subtle me to sleep;
I want tomorrow morning
to come quietly,
to greet me without kisses.
Let me always ache
for knowing;
let me never know the world
in its entirety.

ALONG THE RIVER ROAD

From the time I was thirteen I had to share a bed with my sister Shelly. She was two years younger than me and retarded. She started crying in the middle of the night once and Daddy couldn't quiet her, or my brother Jackie, and finally after I had spent an hour holding her and cooing to her I was so tired I jut laid down next to her and fell asleep, and so did she. From that night on it just became the way things were.

And it wasn't good because Shelly still wet the bed sometimes and I would have to get up and clean it and clean her and me and make the bed. I did not like the glare of the hall light or the noise of the running water and I did not like the feel of that rubber sheet roiling under me, but Shelly would usually sleep fine if I slept with her so that's how things were. "She needs comforting," Daddy said, in that voice that made us know there was nothing more to say.

We lived in the eastern part of the state then, the four of us, in an old white house set well back from the river road. It was the last in a row of houses that began at the highway and got further apart as the road sloped down toward the Lanigiro River. Beyond our house was the flats, a broad flood plain that ran about two hundred yards until it reached a thin strip of woods that ran along the river. We played by the river and in the river, and we played on the train tracks that ran along a ridge on the far side. The spring thaw or any hard rain sent the river spilling onto the flats and across the road, but the waters never reached our house. When I was little Jackie would say "You know, Darl, a big storm and our house would be the first to go. Them flood waters can lift a house right off its foundation and send it off like a boat." I would pretend to get scared and then Jackie would laugh and then I would laugh. Daddy would look in on us and then ask where Shelly was and one of us would check to see if she was OK.

Daddy was a small, hard-muscled man with changeable eyes. In the mornings he drove Shelly to a special school while we waited in front of the house for the bus. We would watch them drive down the river road, which ran straight across the flats, rose up over a moundy little bridge to get across the river, and then continued on out of sight. The river road had been washed over so many times it was practically a dirt road. Coming home at dusk Daddy's car would swirl up a yellow cloud of dust and he looked like he was driving in one of those little shaky toys with

the snow inside. Then when he came into the driveway you could hear the rocks bouncing off his fenders like bullets.

Daddy kept the family together but he didn't make it fun. We had our jobs to do, and we did them, plus we had to watch Shelly. Jackie tried to make me do that. "Why don't you take her out of here and play dolls or something, Darl?" He wanted to watch TV in the living room without listening to Shelly babble on and on. She liked to listen to a Walkman and hum along. She really could kind of sing. She had her favorite songs and if one came on she would wait for her best parts and then sing them a little before they actually played and then laugh when they did. Like she had guessed right or caused an echo or something, who knows. "Shelly don't play dolls," I'd say, "and neither do I." Then Daddy would come to Jackie's rescue: "Darlene, can't you take her out to the blackberry bushes for a little while?"

So I took Shelly and led her outside and didn't look at Jackie because I didn't want to see his smirking face. We had blackberry bushes in the back and along the side where our yard kind of petered out into the plain. I had taught Shelly how to pick the berries. She wouldn't put them in a basket or anything useful, just eat them or throw them or drop them in a little trail like she was Gretel. Shelly might have been retarded but I had to give her credit for being curious. She wasn't afraid of anything and she liked to touch everything and study it close up. One time I came in to the living room and she was sitting on the couch holding a dead blue jay, looking it over like she was a scientist. I said "Shelly! Gimme that for Christ's sake." I guess I scared her. I thought she was going to cry, but she didn't. She looked kind of shocked, and then she smiled and said "Pop-Tart!" That was because most of the words she knew were for snacks, and we gave them to her so she wouldn't throw fits.

It really wasn't a bad day to be outside. The sun was going down and above the river woods there were stripes of purple clouds. It was getting cold though. I looked around for Shelly and saw her crouched by Daddy's car, staring at something. Probably an ant, or maybe nothing at all. I walked around to the living room window, thinking I could look in and play a trick on Jackie, but when I peered over the sill making a scary face he wasn't there. Then I heard him talking to Daddy so I went around to the kitchen window to listen in. Jackie was telling Daddy that he got his learner's permit and wanted to start driving. Daddy looked grim but he wasn't saying no. Jackie told him if he could drive then he could take me places and Daddy wouldn't have to. I knew that was a pile of crap and besides where did I ever go?

"So will you take me to pitch 'n' putt when you're driving?" I asked Jackie the next day. I tried to sound innocent but he figured it out. "Darl the minute I get that license I'm gonna leave a trail of dust behind me, and you in it." He said it serious, but not mean. "You won't have the chance," I said, "cause the car's hardly ever here and when it is Daddy won't want it gone for long. I'll make sure Daddy tells you to take me and Shelly any place I want to go."

"Shows what you know," Jackie said, "cause I got almost $1,800 dollars saved and when I get my license I'm gettin' my own car, and you can see if Daddy will drive you around in that shitbox."

I didn't say anything because I could see it was all true. I could see Jackie and his friends driving fast all over the county and me home with Shelly and Daddy. Jackie wanted to be gone, you could tell. He used to help me with Shelly, would even give her a piggy back ride all the way up the road to the highway and over to the store, so Shelly could pick out her own snacks. But then one day I think somebody said something, his friends or something, because he came back in a real bad mood and just flat out wouldn't do it anymore. Shelly cried and cried but there was no changing Jackie's mind and I didn't have it in me to haul her butt to the store. She's a skinny thing, but almost as tall as me. Then one day we couldn't find her anywhere and the phone rang and it was Carl at the store. Shelly had remembered how to get there and had walked up and gone in and started eating. Daddy had to drive over and settle up with Carl and bring her back. The people in the store thought the whole thing was very funny. In the end Jackie's big contribution to taking care of Shelly turned out to be a real joke. We had to watch her every minute.

So Jackie got his license and a few weeks later he got a car. I don't see where he got off calling Daddy's car a shitbox because his wasn't any better, but he loved it, and except for the times he was coming in or going out it sure was quiet around the house. All winter he was out as much as Daddy would let him, which seemed like a lot. I had control of the TV. I tried to get Shelly to watch but she didn't like TV, not even Sesame Street. She clutched her Walkman and sang with the radio, rocking on the couch, driving me nuts. I could hear the songs leak out of her headphones like sand being shook around the bottom of a pail.

Then spring came and we spent a bright Saturday playing in the soggy yard. There were silver puddles across the flats but the road was open and Jackie bombed across it, driving close to the shoulder, sending sparkling curtains of water fanning out

from his dumb bald tires. If Shelly and I had been walking there he would have splashed us for all he was worth.

Shelly was acting hyper. It had been a cold winter and I guess she was even more glad than me to get outside. That way she had, of being a little lost in her own world, that wasn't how she was that day. She was running around looking at everything like she had never seen it before. We went in for lunch and as soon as we were done I said "Shell-shell let's play Gopher Broke outside." That was a game we made up like hide-and-seek where you're the gopher and you have to get back to the woodpile without getting caught. We were just out on the back steps when the phone rang, and with Jackie gone and Daddy shopping I had to answer it. "Go get ready to count," I told Shelly. I answered the phone and it was Daddy, calling from the store to see if we needed soup. He was a nut about keeping the pantry full, like it was a damn military supply depot, and I wanted to say "Yes we're all set" because I'm sick of soup but I checked anyway and we were almost out. When I got outside I didn't see Shelly standing by the woodpile but I figured maybe she wanted me to be first. I called out for her and looked in front and back and then I saw her. She wasn't in the yard. She was out on the flood plain, running toward the river.

I froze up for a minute because it was such a strange sight. Shelly was running gawky across the plain, zigging around the big puddles and splashing through the small ones.
I saw the white flash of her skinny legs and I heard her fading laughter; then she was just sneaker bottoms and streaming hair disappearing into the woods.

And I ran, hard till it hurt, across the plain, following her deep footprints in the muck until I got to the place where she had disappeared. The plain rose up a little alongside the river and the ground was dry. The woods along either side of the river were only about 20 yards deep and it seemed impossible that anyone could get lost there. I ran through the woods straight to the river thinking Shelly wouldn't know enough to stop at the water, but she wasn't there. I listened, and then I called out. "Shell! Shell-shell! Where are you? Where the hell are you?" I didn't know if she would understand to yell back.

Then I heard a noise, a far-off splashing. I ran through the trees back to the plain but it was just Jackie driving back to the house. I went back into the woods, walking fifty yards each way, calling out and looking and listening. She could not be lost in a thin strip of woods with a two-minute head start. That cannot be. Then I remembered we were going to play Gopher Broke and I called out "Gopher gopher, you win Shelly. I can't catch you and

I can't find you! You win. Let's go back and play again!" I yelled as loud as I could and when I stopped the quiet made its own kind of echo. But there was nothing. I walked through the woods back and forth for another thirty minutes, and still nothing.

I looked at the river. I did not want to go back to the house by myself. Could not bear the thought of crossing the plain without Shelly. Did not want to go into the kitchen with news for Daddy and Jackie that none of us could understand. I pushed through the trees, looked closer and closer at every place I had already looked, went as far as the road and crossed the bridge and looked on the other side but something had happened and Shelly was gone and when I couldn't put it off any more I walked back up the river road to home.

* * *

Then there was the week when our driveway and yard couldn't hold all the cars that came, the police and people that Daddy and Jackie knew and even a reporter that first day. The police wore gray and they stood in our kitchen taking notes and they were too big for the room. Daddy talked to them in short tense sentences and Jackie tried to do the same. When someone said something about dragging the river Jackie said "I thought dragging was for lakes" and Daddy gave him a look and Jackie didn't say anything after that.

I thought the police would ask me questions since I was there and it was my fault, but they didn't. I went outside and looked down to the woods, remembering how when Daddy first found out he went running across the plain in a hard straight line, huge strides and pumping arms. I heard him crash through the trees like he would tear them all down. I heard it when he yelled out for Shelly and I heard it when he stopped.

Then the police were through. Everybody had a theory, about the river or the tracks or the road, but no one knew. I thought about Shelly exploring the woods, finding things that I never would have seen. I did not think of her any other way.

The police left for the last time, drove off down the road toward the river. It had been a warm week and everything was dry now. Jackie came out and he went the same way, driving fast, kicking up a yellow cloud. I could feel Daddy sitting in the kitchen. I saw Jackie's car bounce up over the little bridge and dip from sight. Everything was quiet. I watched the sun drop below the trees, and I thought about the day when I would go down the river road and across the bridge, no coming back, a thin veil of dust settling behind me.

OCEAN DONUTS

I work at Ocean Donuts.
I walk to work, it takes ten minutes.
I have to be there very early.
As I get close I like to smell the ocean
and the doughnuts together.
Andy lets me in the back.
He has gray hair in one long braid,
and when he smiles, you can see his gold tooth.

I get right to work.
I make the coffee and turn the tea water to On.
I set up the self serve: cups, three sizes, lids, and stirrers.
I fill the napkins and the sugars: the blue and the pink.
Then I carry out the trays of doughnuts Andy just made
and fill the shelves with the right kinds.
They all smell good.
I like to sweep the floor once over,
even if the girls did it last night.
I check the tables are clean, too, just in case.

I always finish before 5:00,
then I can pick one doughnut, any kind,
usually custard-filled,
and sit with my coffee, extra cream, no sugar,
outside on the back step for a break.
I watch the ocean and think of Columbus
and feel big and little at the same time.
Any minute my regulars will come through the tinkling door,
all those morning faces,
I know them all.
I sip my last sip of coffee and think:
this is my life, ocean and doughnuts,
and I want to hug the ocean for being so big
and the way I do it
is to take another bite of my custard-filled.

EATING ALONE

The chowder comes.
You dip the silvery spoon,
watch it fill,
bring it to your lips.

You pay full attention
to the spoon, your
arm, your
mouth, the
stillness.

You have a view of the sea.
A low laugh crests above the murmuring voices
and breaks against you.
You'd love to dip an oar into the water
and glide smoothly away.

MICHAEL • LYNCH

FALL BACK

The seasons turn without you
watching. In my room,
morning breaking the window, I read
your postcard again, study the way you sign
your name. I flip the card face-up and leave
it on the bed. Each plane

that passes over my house is the plane
you took to Florida, carrying you
and leaving me buried in the construction paper leaves
that color the windows of every schoolroom.
There are no secrets with the stop-sign:
Fading paint and only one word to read.

You can't hear it read
aloud—alone on the plane
dragging every last sign
of summer with you.
Green warmth tied to a post outside your dormroom.
Here in Boston, people leave

the city to watch the changing colors of leaves.
They somersault down, speak the crisp language of reeds
in wind. Wrangled by rakes and brooms,
they pile together—bonfires against the plain
gray of the street. I hope you
recognize the design:

The foliage exploding in neon like the Citgo sign
a billboard of burnt leaves.
These are my poems, my letters to you
flaring into yellows and reds
pleading like a banner pulled by a plane;
the sky huddling like a mushroom.

Walking home, I can't face the smallness of my room.
I exhale frost and lean back against the cold iron of a sign-
post. Maybe there is no need to explain
why I kick my way through leaves
and rake up dead poems that no one reads,
all about you:

There's less room here without you.
Everything is a sign that reads:
This is a planet of dead leaves.

Besides satisfying a myriad of voyeuristic tendencies, one of the major benefits of studying psychology is the self-imposed license to analyze one's family and friends until the obsessive-compulsive cows come home. Political correctness does not apply to those near and dear. I have frequently diagnosed my sisters as retarded, my mother as nuts, and my father as weird. Often there was some disagreement about my learned opinion, indicating that my whole family was in denial, a common defense mechanism. My boyfriend laughs, but humor has been known to be highly correlated with repressed feelings of inadequacy.

My classmates, fellow prospective practitioners in the field of mental health, have the annoying tendency to analyze me while I'm analyzing them. If I wear black they wonder if I'm grieving for some real or perceived loss, although usually the driving force behind any fashion statement I make concerns my inability to face the reality of a laundromat on a regular basis. According to my esteemed peers, this in itself could indicate some serious dysfunction. They're just messed up. And we all know that women get catty when suffering from Late Luteal Phase Dysphoric Disorder, otherwise known as Pre-Menstrual Syndrome.

Yes, this is a proposed diagnostic category which may appear in the next edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the Bible according to Freud. Among its symptoms are tiredness, irritability or sadness, marked change in appetite, and physical pain, all of which can interfere with social and occupational functioning.

Complementing this condition nicely in women is the proposed Self-Defeating Personality Disorder which describes a person who, among other things, is drawn to relationships which may cause them to suffer in some way. A Sexual Disorder Not Otherwise Specified describes people having "marked feelings of inadequacy concerning size and shape of body or sex organs, sexual performance, or other traits related to the self-imposed standards of masculinity or femininity; distress about a pattern of repeated sexual conquests involving a succession of (consenting) people who exist only as things to be used; and/or persistent and marked distress about sexual orientation."

And then there's the Identity Disorder whose essential feature is "distress regarding inability to integrate aspects of the self into a relatively coherent and acceptable sense of self." Frequently the disturbance is epitomized by the person's asking "Who am I?" I'm glad I don't know anyone with any of these

problems. I'm waiting for a proposal describing a syndrome called "Why me?" I know I have it.

This manual also rates life stressors from 2 (mild) to 6 (catastrophic) so that you know if you have a right to be really depressed or if you're just being a whiny baby. And if you're complaining about inconsequential problems, you're pretty maladjusted anyway. I can tell by the way you scratch your nose, a behavior highly correlated with dysfunction.

I could be reading into things a tad. Once, working as a counselor for developmentally disabled adults, I took a client to see a clinical psychologist because said client was having disturbing nightmares. I felt my BA in English made me well qualified to diagnose her as a victim of serious trauma or abuse, and I proposed as much to the therapist. After asking a few probing questions punctuated by "Hmm" and "Aha," he told her to stop drinking Mountain Dew at bedtime and all was well.

So anyway, let me see if I get it right: Bulimia is not ok; Kate Moss and Barbie are. Alcoholism is not ok; alcohol advertisements promising you a mountain, a stream, a truck, and a scantily clad woman are. Drug abuse, no; instant gratification, yes. Pornography, no; Playboy, yes.

It's enough to send me into a major depression. On the other hand, maybe it's just That Time of the Month.

68 LYMON STREET

The Victorian house,
built when women wore
corsets so tight they couldn't
breathe,
still stands.

The arched hallways tremble
as the old man drags
his quick cement
through the grand foyer
and over oriental rugs
to stifle the six marble fire places.
The corset constricts.

The woman turns, turns on
the beveled glass lamp,
caresses the mahogany handrail
up the spindled staircase
to an empty room,
where the air has peeled
the paint and
pulled the wallpaper
down.
The water stained ceiling
draws a portrait of Abraham Lincoln.
He probably slept here too.

Outside, no paint protects the house
but the wood endures,
while a stone wall wrapped
with scrawny roses
keeps the street out.

SATURDAY MORNING SIBYLS

I answer the door in my robe.
You're squinting from the sun, have a paper bag
clenched in your fist. You've been walking
around the pond for hours thinking
it's too early to stop by.
My cats follow us down the hallway
to the kitchen where the bay windows
are shaded by trees, their leaves dropping
and twisting, sometimes
skimming the panes.

While you're in the bathroom
I open the back door, wait
for a burst of wind, let leaves
rush in and cover the linoleum.
When you come back I stand, hands on hips,
surrounded by brown stems, and foretell
your barren destiny.
You turn your tea cup over onto the bone-
china saucer and stare at clumps
of jasmine twigs.

You finally agree;
it will not turn blue.

But when it does
you rifle through the trash
for the box, the tissue-paper instructions
that you crumpled up and tossed away
like a bad fortune.

SOMETHING ABOUT LOVE

All week I've thought of you; at night you're in my dreams. All day long I've thought of you, walking the streets of the city where you and I grew up, where we stayed, when it seemed like everyone else had left. I keep thinking I'll see you, stepping off the subway, crossing the street, running out in front of traffic, smiling at all the pretty girls.

I think of how you crept these streets, late at night, coming home with offerings of potted plants, stolen from anonymous window-sills. How we walked barefoot through these streets, protecting our eyes from the sun, in search of air conditioning and all-day breakfast specials, after staying up all night and letting the streets dissolve in drunkenness.

Our street had little boys who threw snowballs at our windows, an all-night donut shop, and a greying alley cat you called Clover. One afternoon I heard you yelling at those boys and then the rock smashing through the window. It landed near the bed—the mattress on the floor, the sheets that never stayed on its corners. The kids ran away laughing and you cut up an album cover, taped it over the pane and swore when you cut your finger on the broken glass. The window stayed like that all winter, until you left in the spring and I finally called the landlord.

All day long I see couples walking down the street arm in arm, kissing, laughing... I keep feeling your head on my shoulder, keep hearing you call my name from across the street. In my head I hear you telling me stories. The one about when you were fifteen and you stood somewhere on one of these streets, smoking cigarettes with the older boys who talked you into lifting a fifth of rum from the corner store. The first mouthful you spit out on the side walk. You couldn't stand the laughter and let the second just slide down your throat. You felt your face turn red, let your cigarette burn down right to your finger tips. Later you staggered home with Bacardi on your breath, faced the sting of your mother's back hand. After that she gave up. You left.

Last weekend I celebrated my birthday in that bar where we used to play pinball. The one where started to bang on one of the machines and the bartender asked you to mellow out and you told him to fuck off. Then the bouncer grabbed you by your shirt and threw you out on the street with a bloody nose. We never got the blood out. But you still wore it anyway, the blood fading a duller brown with every wash. I spent the night at that bar,

downstairs in virtual darkness where the band played, loud and unmelodic. I hugged the first stranger who offered me a drink, lost myself in the smokey heaven on his embrace. He drank from a bottle, not a mug like you used to. Draft beers were cheaper. You never had money. On our first date we went to the river with a bottle of wine and listened to a reggae band playing beneath the Hatch Shell. We danced by the river bank, swatting mosquitos. I want to know everything about you, you said, bare foot, grass between your toes. The next year we went back with a bottle of champagne and a red-checkered blanket. Our anniversary. My birthday.

Today I tread over steel grates, step over cracks in the pavement, swerve around dog shit. Look! I'm walking! It's June. The month I was born. The month you died. It's funny how those two events coincide. Right down to the date. It's hilarious how we never spoke after you left the city and moved down South to paint houses, start a new band.

One winter afternoon you stood on one of these streets, outside the cafe where I used to work. A rose between your teeth. I smiled at the foggy panes that framed your pink face and left some cork floating in a bottle of white wine. I poured brown specks into the glasses of late-lunching businessmen and watched you do a pirouette. Then you trekked through snow onto the purple and black paisley rug, sneaking me a kiss. Your cheek smelled like roses.

I told him all about you, that guy in the bar buying me drinks all night. He told me I would cry someday. It just works that way, he said, you never know, things just happen. You never know. How could you know, I told him, not knowing me, not knowing you. He looked nothing like you. He wore a Red Sox cap twisted on backwards, a bit of hair spiking out of the top. He had on one of those white tank tops, paper thin, like my dad used to wear. My father never liked you. Nuts, he called you. He was never as quiet as that night we went over to their apartment. My mother stood over the sink with the strainer, spilling out spaghetti. You wore her apron. She always wore that. You stirred the sauce and then tapped out a beat on the stove-top with the wooden spoon, splashing tomato sauce on my dad's white shirt as he walked by. I imagine him sopping up the sauce on the plate with a hunk of bread while you described your new bass line--bum-bum- da-da-da-bum—your fork and knife both going.

I never asked him his name. I don't think I wanted to see him again after that night. I just liked the way his hands felt beneath my shirt, hugging my shoulder blades. He held me so tight I could have cried. I left before the band stopped, before the lights

went on. Said I was going to the bathroom and snuck out the back door.

I don't even really know what happened to you. Your mother said it was an accident, that you were drunk and fighting with some guy in a bar and there was a gun. There was a gun and there was a fight and a guy. It went off. It happened so fast you didn't feel it. Right in your head. That spikey blond head that slept on the pillow next to mine. I used to know that head so well. You never know.

So, what was it like, to get shot in the head? I guess I'll never know. You can't tell me, like you did about the time when you lost your finger. You were twelve and your dad came back. He took you canoeing for the weekend. You got thrown into a down current and were slammed against the rocks. You were numbed by the shock and your dad left you at the hospital before your mom came. The pinky one. Did you know it took me a whole week to realize it wasn't there? One week, your hands were everywhere, and I never noticed. Sometimes you even forgot it wasn't there.

Your mother worried about you, you know. But you wouldn't know, never returning her calls, making me tell her that you were never there. I was the one who went to visit her. She showed me your baby pictures, your first-grade graduation. Big blue eyes and a bowl haircut. I don't know what I did, she said. We were in the kitchen. Her thumb pressed the circular edge of the pie-crust, making soft ridges in the dough. I mixed the apples and the cinnamon. I never use sugar, she said. The apples are sweet enough. What's he like now, she had to ask. I know something has changed. She looked at me, wiped her hands on her jeans. She knew everything, your mother. I couldn't say anything. She touched my eye all caked with make-up. The chalky bulge answered her question. Forty-five minutes, she said, shaking her head.

Who knows what happened to you. To us. There was a time when we could walk down these streets arm in arm, our feet barely touching the ground. We were the only people in the world; love's like that. Love's like that at first, but it changes over the years. From hugs and kisses to curses and fists and a woman named Susan haunting the telephone. I just don't know why you never said anything. Did you think I was asleep? Or did you just not care? It was easy for me then, to cry at three a.m., hearing the front door shut and the sound of your boots down the steps. You'd shower me with coffee and donuts by eight, telling me that you just couldn't sleep. Susan. By nine I was off to work

and God knows what you did. You're never here for me, you said. I was there. You were the one going a million miles a minute. Come on, be serious, I always begged. I am serious, you said, watching a roach out of the corner of your eye, ordering another beer, tapping your feet under the table. I wanted to make you stop. Slow you down. Make you talk to me. But you were gone. Susan. By then I was scraping my knees on the ground and you were still dancing on the sidewalk. Nothing seemed to bother you. Love became an apology. I wish you could know how hard it was for me to tell you to leave, to let you go. You took all you owned, stuffed it into trash bags and stacked them near the door, on the wooden floor with Christmas tree nettles still stuck in its cracks. We hadn't talked for days. We hadn't touched in months. I watched you from the window, loading green bags onto the back of Joe's truck, driving away. I remember the empty spaces on the walls, the dust balls on your side of the closet. You left your stereo, but took all the albums. All except for *Rock and Roll Animal*. The black disc stuck out of what was left of the cover, half of it had been chopped off, right at Lou Reed's neck. The rest of his body was squared off and clung by faded masking tape to the window frame. Right in the head. What did it feel like? You must have felt something. I know I did. It just works that way.

PEGGY SUE

I'm a scarecrow without my needle
she's that she's all that
Just a Peggy Sue shooting strawman
she's that she's all that
She is she's syringe and she makes me
shuffle cold night streets lame begging strawman
looking for a score
beside a newsstand magazine rack
...Club, Tail End, Velvet ...junked strawman
trick's in thinking every aspect's hers
Looky here she's that yeah ughmm she's all that.

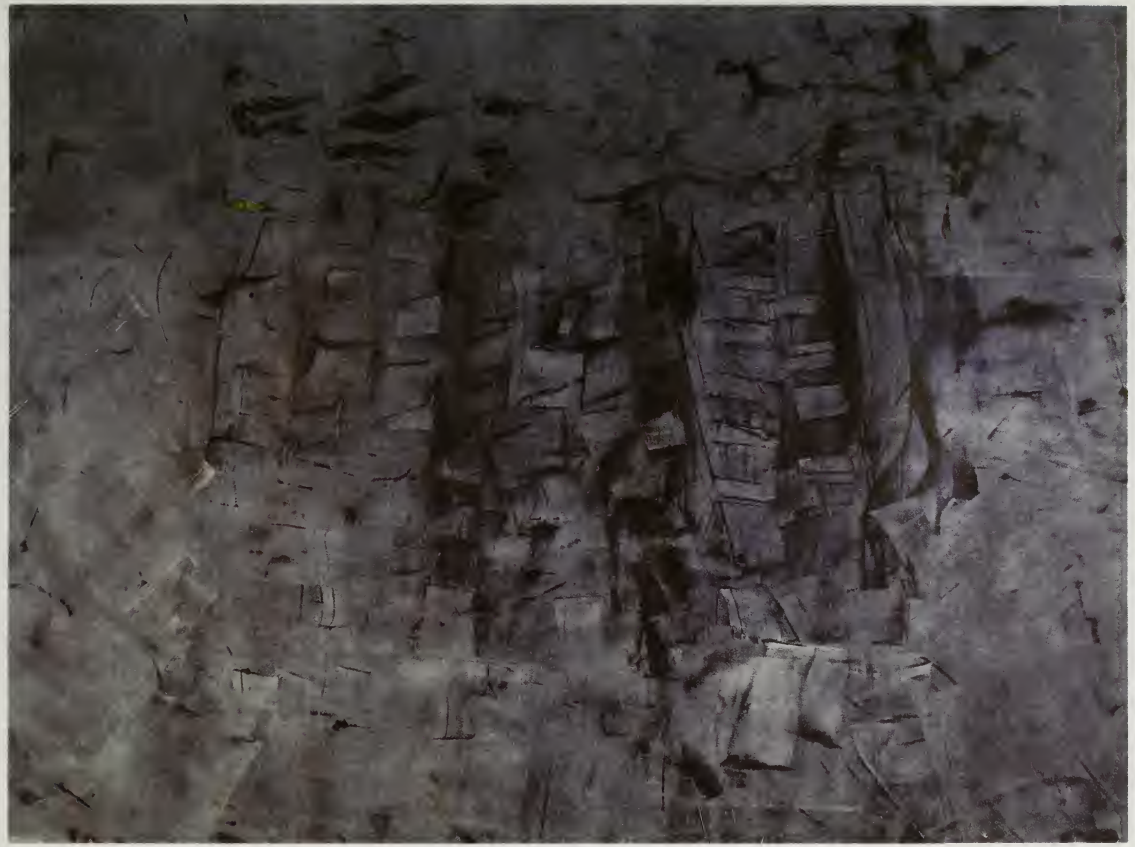
NEST

I needa nest
I needa be high
high in my nest
warm bowl like nest
you could be with me
there high in my nest
gotsta be little
there high in my nest
I'll chase your sparrow
I'll catch your sparrow
I needa high
I needa be nest
nest in my high
warm nest like bowl
warm nest like bowl.

JONATHON • WACHS
UNTITLED

CH • WILLSON
PRESIDENTIAL~
PARTY

LISA • P • HAGERTY
UNTITLED



JOHNATHON• WACHS
UNTITLED

STEVE • BAILEY
UNTITLED

CH • WILLSON
FESTIVAL

Stan Kaplan
GREEN LINE

STEPHEN • BAILEY
UNTITLED

Miriam,
a pleasure
to sit in
your kitchen
and eat a bowl
of oatmeal
this drizzling
April morning.
I stole
back upstairs,
took with my tongue
the salt
from your shoulder.
-Sam

LULLABYE AND GOODBYE

I think it was the last time he was home sick that I decided to do it. It had crossed my mind before on occasion, but I'd never let myself dwell on it. I'm not sure why. But now I'd been cooped up with him in the house for over 24 hours, no play group to give me a few hours peace, and his being sick made it that much worse. "Mommy, I'm tired." "Mommy, I wanna watch cartoons." "Mommy, my toast is cold." "Read to me." "Rock me." God almighty, I thought I was going to scream. How the hell could I get any work done with all that whining? Not that you'd know how unhappy I was to look at me. I said all the right things, cooed in all the right places. I even put a wet washcloth on his forehead when he seemed a little feverish. I remembered that one from some TV program. I did snap at him once but that was only when he kept interrupting me while I was trying to conduct that phone interview. He's got to learn that the sun doesn't rise and set on him; he is not the center of my universe.

What makes this all so screamingly funny is that I didn't want him in the first place. That idiot ex-husband of mine was the one who was so keen on having a baby. So I had one to please him, and in the end it still didn't help. Harold walked and left me holding the bag. If he were one of those sensitive, new age men he might have fought for custody, and believe me, I'd have let him win. But no, he only wanted a baby in theory, not practice. It might not have been so bad if it'd been a girl. It could've been like having a life-sized Barbie. Oh, the clothes I could have dressed her in; I'd have even put us in matching outfits on occasion. Alas, that was not to be. Leave it to me to get it all wrong and have a boy.

He's almost four now, which means I still have years ahead of me of having to take care of him, and I can't do it. I just can't do it.

Technically I know I don't have to kill him, I could just put him up for adoption or something, but then I'd have to move because I'd be judged some kind of heinous monster. "What? A mother not love and want her child. What's wrong with her?" And there's no use explaining because nobody wants to hear. Mothers love their children. End of discussion. It's not that I didn't try. I even breast fed him thinking that would help me bond with him, but it didn't. It hurt and only made me feel like a feeding trough. Plus, I know that even if I could leave him and start over somewhere else he'd be one of those stupid kids who'd decide to track me down and reestablish familial ties once he's an adult. I can

see him now sobbing on the Maury Povich show as I'm brought out from backstage for the requisite misty-eyed hug. I think I'd kill myself then.

No, he's had plenty of time to win me over and it's obviously not going to happen, and I don't want to take the chance that he'll keep reappearing in my life, so I need him to go away for good.

Luckily, for appearance's sake, I've put on a pretty good show of being a devoted mother so no one should suspect me if I'm very careful. But if there's even the slightest bit of suspicion surrounding his death, I'll be the prime suspect because there's no reason for anyone else to kill him.

He has to have an accident, I have to be nowhere in the vicinity, and there can't be even a hint of foul play. To complicate things even further, I also want it to be as quick and painless as possible. After all, I'm not a monster. I don't take pleasure in people suffering.

Now I just have to figure out how to do it.

My first thought was a SIDS death, but it's too risky and I think he's too old now for that to be a viable possibility. Besides, he'd have to be in the house with me. My next thought was a drowning. I know one of his little play school buddies has a pool. Children are always falling in and drowning, and I've heard that after the first shock of gasping for air you just sort of fall asleep under water, no real pain at all. But it might take forever to happen, if at all, unless I'm there to make sure it does. Again, I'd be too close to the scene. If only he had some severe food allergy, preferably to something common like peanut butter, then it'd be easy. I'd just pack him off to camp or some party and forget to tell whomever's in charge about it. When he died there might be a question as to how I'd forgotten something so important, but I'd be hysterical and guilty and everyone would feel sorry for me. Besides, no matter what anyone thought, you can't prove something like an omission, just the commission of a deed. Damn him! He's not making this any easier.

Think, Marlena, think! People die every day in a hundred different ways so why can't I think of anything. I'm a writer too. You'd think I'd have enough imagination to come up with something foolproof. Of course, to be fair to myself, I don't write fiction. Research articles on women's health issues aren't exactly fodder for how to do away with someone. If only I were lucky enough, he'd die accidentally on his own. Wouldn't that be a riot. I'd spend weeks agonizing over how to do it just right and then he'd fall out a window all by himself. I might as well forget the wishful thinking, though. That'd be too convenient, and if there's

one thing that boy is not, it's convenient.

I can't worry about it anymore. I just have to put it away for now because I know when I'm obsessing like this my brain is locked on the treadmill going round and round in circles. And it's not like I haven't got the time. For heaven's sake, I've put up with him for almost four years. What's a few more weeks or months as long as when it's done, it's done right. It's like my mother used to say, "Be patient, Marlena. Remember all things come to those who wait."

I'm here to tell you Mother was wrong. I tried waiting. I even tried directed thinking and nothing came to me. The next step was to do some research. Let me tell you, there are more ways to kill someone than you can possibly imagine—shooting, poisoning, knifing, electrocuting, suffocating, burning. You name it, I've read about it. But don't worry, not in the open. That's all I need, some stupid librarian at the police station after the fact: "You know officer, now that I think about it I do remember that boy's mother checking out '101 Quick and Easy Ways To Do Away With Your Loved Ones.'" No, I was smart. Went to libraries way out of my area. Even used a disguise on occasion. No one is going to remember me, that's certain, but it really doesn't matter because nothing I read helped me. The problem is all these methods are geared to adults. You would think in all the annals of literature on murder someone would have focused on children. Well I'm here to tell you it's not so. Don't get me wrong. Children are being killed all the time, just not with any subtlety. When they die, foul play is readily apparent and the police are right there. Now with an adult you can do something simple like fake a suicide, but that kind of set up doesn't work very well with a three-year old.

Being bastions of violence, I next focused on movies and television, but not even Hitchcock helped unless I can figure out how to send a carousel spinning out of control at about 90 miles an hour. That'd be a ride he'd never forget, at least until he took off like a pistol shot. However, he wouldn't be the only child at risk, and as much as I'd like my little darling to leave this planet, I don't feel it necessary to send three or four strangers with him.

You know what the sad thing is? With most three-year olds you only have to take your eye off them for a few minutes and they've gotten themselves into serious trouble. Not my boy. No, I gave birth to an anal retentive Eagle Scout. Leave matches lying around, he puts them in a drawer. Forget to put away the Drano? Three days later it'll be right where you left it, unopened. Once, I purposely left three plastic garment bags lying

in his play area. You know the ones with "Danger. Keep away from small children. May cause suffocation. " Merely for experimental purposes, I can assure you. He doesn't crawl into them; he sits on them, then rolls them into balls to toss around, then throws them in his baby trash can. Do you think he's picked up on my plans? I can't imagine it's possible, but his unbelievably cautious behavior makes me wonder. Never mind. What matters is getting rid of him and soon because I'm starting not to care if I get caught or not.

I figured it out, and it's just so wonderful, so perfect, that it's all I can do not to share it with someone. My inspiration came today when junior and I were out grocery shopping. I was rolling down the cereal aisle when I bumped into Kelly Paxson, a sweet but somewhat dim-witted girl who's babysat for me once or twice in the past. Of course we stopped to chat and coo over my precious angel. Oh, how I love doing that. She mentioned being available to babysit again if I ever needed someone; her number was still the same. I nodded and smiled amiably and went on my merry way. Then it started nagging at me. She was an okay girl for a teenager so why hadn't I used her again? I couldn't remember her doing anything awful in the house so what was it? Then it came to me—she had some problem with her nose that affected her sense of smell. Nothing had happened in my place but I had overheard one of the mothers at pre-school saying she'd never hire Kelly again after she came home to find the place reeking from perfume that had gotten knocked over in the bathroom. Kelly hadn't noticed the spill and then didn't realize how strong the smell was; she just thought there was a light floral scent in the house, like "garden bouquet" air freshener. Hearing that I had made a mental note not to use her anymore. I was afraid to walk in some night and find my apartment bathed in White Shoulders, or even worse, going up in flames because this twit couldn't smell smoke, although to be fair, my smoke alarms would have alerted her.

Never mind. The important thing was she had a wonderful defect. By the time I got home and was piling canned peas and tuna into my kitchen cabinets, I knew what I was going to do.

I have a defective stove that I keep forgetting to have fixed. The problem is with the pilot light. It lights up fine, but soon goes out, and within minutes all you smell is gas rather than *boeuf bourguignonne*. Well, that's what you or I would smell, but not olfactorily impaired Kelly. I expected she would smell nothing until it was too late. But I bet my little boy would. He'd smell that gas and have Kelly opening the windows and calling

the fire department before they'd even gotten drowsy. If he were awake that is. Yes, what I'd have to do is make sure he was sound asleep when the gas started filling up the apartment. He's a deep sleeper, too, and probably wouldn't wake up in time if he were really snoozing when the pilot light went out.

See if this doesn't sound good: It's January and cold as hell so all the windows will be shut tight. The apartment is in a yuppie condo complex, and the four other rooms on my floor are occupied by various career types who never seem to arrive home before 7:00 p.m. Thus, no one else around to smell anything and play hero. I make up a slow-cooking roast in a big Dutch oven, tell Kelly to put it in the stove at 325 degrees for two hours so it's ready when I walk in the door at 6:00 p.m. That's two hours of gas filling the place unless Kelly has sense enough to check on the meat, which I am positive she will not do. As for my little boy, I will make sure to get him up early that morning, run him ragged playing with him, then tell Kelly not to put him down till 3:30 p.m. I know him well enough to know he'll be out like a light in five minutes and sleep like the dead—no pun intended—for three solid hours unless someone physically shakes him awake. I arrive home at 6:00 p.m., find them incapable of being revived despite my most valiant efforts. And the beauty of it is I'm not there when it happens; they just fall asleep forever, no pain or suffering.

I can barely talk about it, it's so upsetting. My big day arrived, everything worked out according to plan. I come home, open the door, walk in and find....Kelly watching some Mel Gibson video and my baby just waking up from a restful nap. It seems that idiot Kelly became so engrossed in what she was watching she completely forgot to put the roast in the stove at all. When I reminded her, she was mortified and profusely apologetic, even offered to give up her babysitting fee. I was a generous employer. I understood and paid her on the condition that she babysit for me again—at half price next time—and if I leave another roast to cook, she cooks it, or I'll never use her services again, and I'll tell all the mothers I know about her incompetence. She was quite grateful and swore nothing like this would ever happen again. Let's hope not. It's bad enough he's not dead, but now I have to shell out another twenty bucks for a second pork roast.

Don't believe what they tell you. The second time's the charm, not the third. I waited a few weeks after my first disaster with Kelly before I called her again. She was anxious to prove herself

to me which is just what I wanted to hear. She showed up exactly when I asked her to and listened carefully to my instructions regarding the fresh ham with peppercorns. I knew she'd remember the oven this time. My only concern was in her eagerness to get back in my good graces she'd check on the ham three or four times and notice it wasn't getting cooked. In the end there was nothing I could do about that but cross my fingers and hope for the best. I needn't have worried.

I was a bit apprehensive when I stepped out of the elevator a little after 6:00 p.m., but I relaxed when I could smell gas in the hall. I took my time approaching the door and fumbled for my keys. When I entered the apartment, I was almost knocked back from the smell. I left the door open and ran around opening windows while I screamed for help. Then I turned off the stove, gave it a loving pat, and checked on my son first. No breathing, no pulse; he had to be dead. Kelly lay slack-jawed on the sofa, no response from her either. Feigning hysteria, I called the fire department, the police, and Kelly's number. I let a roommate know what had happened and asked for the number of Kelly's mom. That was a hard call to make, but I felt I owed it to Kelly to be the one to tell her mother myself. Soon the apartment was full of people. Heroic efforts were made, but alas, help arrived too late. In giving my statement to the police I cried beautifully and blamed myself for not thinking to check the stove for any defects. Anyway, shouldn't Kelly have smelled the gas? What's that, Mrs. Paxson? Kelly had problems with her nose? If I'd only known. We wailed aloud together over our misfortune and sense of guilt.

The funerals were the worst, a veritable media circus. Mrs. Paxson and I decided on a joint send-off from St. John the Evangelist Church on East 55th Street. It was a lovely service, despite the flashbulbs. I only had one moment of regret, when I placed a white rose on Kelly's coffin, but some things just can't be helped. I consoled myself with the fact that she never had all that much going on upstairs anyway. I mean, it's not like I've deprived the world of the next Madame Curie or anything.

As for my boy, I'm sure he's happy and peaceful wherever he is. I even accorded him the honor of having one of my favorite Shakespeare quotes written on his headstone: "Good night, sweet Prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest." A nice touch, if I do say so myself.

Two months have passed and everyone but those directly involved has forgotten about the tragedy. I stopped working and turned my baby's room into a living memorial complete with votive candles, that is until loving friends convinced me that he would have wanted me to get on with my life. How right they are. Consequently, I've put the condo on the market and am looking for another place to live. I'll have to take a financial loss, what with the ugly connotations associated with this address, but some things are worth the price. I'm keeping up appearances for now, making sure to visit the grave site once a week to leave forget-me-nots on his plot. I've ended contact with Mrs. Paxson due to the painful memories associated with seeing her. She understands completely. There have been no inquiries.

In another week or so I plan to start working again. I believe I'll be writing a piece for a Canadian magazine on the tragedy of infertility and what desperate women are doing to get pregnant. The poor things.

BELLY~BUTTON

Helena slung her book bag over her shoulder and navigated through the neighbor's disheveled bushes. With measured steps, she emerge from the forbidden shortcut into her backyard. The scent of freshly burning wood permeated the clear, crisp November air. Helena breathed deeply, savoring the scent, a harbinger of the long holiday weekend. She dismissed all of her mathematical and penmanship dilemmas, hurried up the steps, yanked at the door handle and stumbled into the kitchen.

Mrs. Donovan embraced her tottering daughter, wishing that her middle-aged nine-year-old would behave like this more often. "She's too serious," she'd told her husband once, but he'd ended the discussion with one of his short, abrasive answers.

"Nonsense," he'd snapped, "She's just a brooder—like me."

As if this was a good quality. Mrs. Donovan never mentioned the subject again.

Helena's eyes darted about the kitchen. When she spotted the black duffle bag next tho the stove, she squirmed out of her mother's arms and ran into the living room. And there he was, regally couched upon the overstuffed sofa, waiting for her.

"Hello, Bubbles."

Helena flung her arms around her brother's neck and burrowed her face into his shoulder. Robert basked in the adulation. He slowly peeled Helena's fingers from his neck, noticing her brittle nails. He waved the stubby fingers at her..

"Snacking again?" he asked.

Helena cowered. "I'm sorry."

He smiled. "Biting your nails is a bad habit."

Helena shrugged. "At least I gave up sucking my thumb," she said. Eight years of arduous thumb-sucking had caused her right thumb to form tiny callouses, or, for those who could not pronounce callous—bubbles. Nearly a year had passed since she'd quit and the callouses had disappeared, but the nickname—still pleasant yet sometimes embarrassing—remained.

Helena changed the subject. "When do you have to go back to school?"

"Sunday." Robert turned to his mother. "Where's Katherine?"

"Field hockey practice." I'm picking her up at the high school at around six."

"What time is dinner?" he asked.

"Six-thirty," she answered, rubbing her hands on her apron. "Why?"

"I'm going out with Tommy tonight."

A look of disappointment flashed across Mrs. Donovan's face. But she said nothing and returned to the kitchen.

Helena gathered her lower lip in her teeth and cast a disappointed glance at her brother. Robert smiled.

"It's just tonight, Bubbles," he said. "I haven't seen Tommy since the summer. I promise to kiss you goodnight when I get in."

Helena nodded. Robert draped his arm around her shoulder, grabbed the remote control and clicked on the television. Helena remained next to him, peaceful and content.

She slept restlessly that evening, listening for slowly moving card, for slamming car doors, for footsteps approaching the side door. She watched the flashing digital clock. Finally, at about two a.m., she fell asleep.

She was awakened by a strange odor. Familiar but distant. Strong, sour. Like bad beer. Her Uncle John smelled like that sometimes.

Robert stood over her bed. "Push over," he whispered.

Helena obeyed. Robert lifted the covers and snuggled next to her. He breathed heavily into her neck. Now that he was closer, Helena could also detect the faint odor of Mexican food. Robert slipped his hands about her waist. Helena stiffened.

Six summers had passed since Helena's parents decided to paint the bedrooms in their moderate split-level home. One night, Robert slept in Helena's room because the humid, pungent air made the paint fumes in his freshly painted room unbearable. Robert and Helena giggled all night, amused by Helena's enunciation of the word bellybutton. Robert made Helena say it over and over, laughing heartily each time Helena repeated it. Helena pronounced each syllable slowly and meticulously, as if the word carried great importance in the English language. Helena laughed because Robert laughed.

"Bel-ly-butt-ooon."

Tonight Helena lay cautiously still, her arms bunched and crossed tightly at her chest. She thought of the word over and over and over.

Bellybutton.

* * *

Helena wished that her sheets smelled like they did in the spring-time. When she gathered the bedclothes up to her chin, she smelled laundry detergent, instead of the sprouting blossoms that clung to the fresh, line-dried sheets.

The blinds in her room were still closed, but Helena knew it was a sunny morning. A band of light had intruded through the blinds and stretched across the ceiling. Helena rolled on to her side and pulled the covers over her head, tried to smother the morning noises coming from the kitchen. But the tinkering of pots and pans only grew louder and

the muffled voices slowly became moans and whispers intended only for Helena's ears. Helena was mesmerized by the sounds, by her room , by the scent of her soapy smelling blankets.

She realized then the she was naked and scurried to find her pajamas, a lump of flannel on the floor. Helena put on her bathrobe and headed downstairs for breakfast.

She was at the top of the stairs when she realized that she'd forgotten something else.

Underwear. She needed a clean pair of underwear.

* * *

"You're awful quiet this morning," Mrs. Donovan said. She placed two slices of toast on her daughter's plate.

Helena shrugged.

"Peanut butter?"

Helena nodded.

Mrs. Donovan sat down at the head of the table. She folded her arms across her chest. "I thought it might be fun if we did some Christmas shopping today."

Helena gulped her milk. "Who's going?"

"You, me, Robert, Katherine."

"Okay."

Mrs. Donovan removed some dirty dishes from the table. "Robert's not up yet, but once he is, we can get going."

Helena nodded again. "Do I have time for a bath?"

"You took a bath last night. Why do you want to take another one?"

"I don't know."

"Well, sure. But take one now. Robert will probably be getting up soon."

Helena pushed her chair away from the table and hurried upstairs.

The bathroom was the only room in the house with a lock and Mrs. Donovan had forbidden her children from using it. Ever since she heard the story about the child who drowned in the bathtub, she said that a polite knock on the closed bathroom door would preserve everyone's privacy. No locks. Under any circumstances.

Helena locked herself in. She couldn't help it. She sat at the edge of the tub, placed her hand under the spout and watched the water run over her fingers. The water was hot; Helena moved her hand back and forth, away from the stream and then under it again. Her lips trembled and her teeth chattered. She supposed that she was cold. A blanket of steam rose from the tub and waited for her body to adjust to the temperature.

The warm water was soothing. Helena lay all the way back and dipped her head below the surface. She could hear nothing but the

swirl of water about her ears, could feel nothing but the moistness about her face. Slowly she began to notice the gentle tickle of her hair against her shoulders.

She was startled by the gentle rap on the door.

"Bubbles," called Robert, "Are you okay in there?"

"Yes," she said. "I'll be out soon."

"I don't feel like going shopping," Helena told her mother. They were all standing at the front door, ready to leave.

Mrs. Donovan drew a breath of exasperation. "Why? When I first asked you, you said you wanted to go." She raised both of her hands to her temples. "What made you change your mind?"

"I don't know," answered Helena, shifting her feet. "Too crowded."

"Come on, Bubbles. It'll be fun."

Helena raised her eyes to meet her brother's. "Don't feel like it."

Robert looked away.

She remained in her room all day with a glass of milk, several Oreos, and her favorite Babysitters' Club mystery. She wrapped herself in her favorite afghan, a blue and white cloak of solitude. Every time she heard a clanky car engine, Helena peeked out the window to see if it was her family. Her eyes grew weary from reading and her spirit grew tired of anticipating. She fell asleep.

Robert's hands upon her shoulders woke her.

"Wake up."

Helena gathered the afghan more tightly about her. she feigned grogginess.

"Come on, Bubbles," he said. "I have something for you."

Helena opened her eyes.

"Here," he said, handing her a small, festively wrapped package.

Helena was grateful to have something to look at, something other than Robert. She stared so hard at the package the she began to think she was looking into a kaleidoscope.

"Go on, open it. I think you'll like it."

It was a gold locket, a beautiful, heart-shaped gold locket.

"I know you lost the locket Nana gave you last year for your birthday and I thought it would be nice if you had a new one."

Helena said nothing.

"here, let me help you put it on."

Helena turned her back to him and pulled her hair up so he could fasten the locket around her neck. She gasped as the cold metal grazed her skin.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome. It's an early Christmas gift." He smiled.

So did she. The best she could.

...AND YOU THOUGHT ULYSSES WAS ODD

I leaned over the rail and watched eighty thousand tons of grey steel cut through the glassy calm of indigo waters. Nothing played in the wake as the dolphins and flying fish abandoned us to the shallows. The anchor dropped about two miles from the sleepy island. It was dawn and, under normal circumstances, time for me to turn in.

Within an hour's time, though, Miguel, Tom, and I were climbing from the liberty boat up onto the dock in Colombo. We wandered aimlessly through markets before making the critical decision to find lodging. A cab was hailed; in hope of vacancy, a drive engineered towards the suburbs. Our competition, approximately five thousand sailors.

No luck; we seemed to look forever; from affluency to impoverishment, every room was taken. Dusk was fast approaching and I could hardly keep my eyes open. My decision-making ability, suspect with sleep, was fast becoming clouded. Tom, a curly headed Nebraskan, assumed the role of leader. An angry middleweight from a broken family, he was steady and reliable. I drifted in and out of consciousness as the exotic street scenes passed by my window.

I vaguely recall being prodded out of the cab, loaded up like a damn sherpa, and shoved towards a respectable looking guest house about a two hour drive from the city. My cohorts, who worked the day shift, made the necessary arrangements with the proprietor. I collapsed into one of the two beds — the one with mosquito netting — and was gone.

I drifted to when Miguel and Tom entered with a couple of Sri Lankan men. One, a businessman (sold sea shells by the seashore — no bullshit, I purchased some), the other man, a cab driver, declared themselves our guides. "Anything you need, we are at your service," they said.

I was in goose-down heaven when Miguel, who hailed from Throg's Neck, New York City, where it was common place to die unnaturally, began negotiations with the Sri Lankans to purchase a recreational amount of heroin. Miguel was covered by tattoos, and full of bravado but little ability — the dangerous clown of our group. He had gotten involved in that bathtub-dust scene that swept through New York in the late seventies. He could never quite extricate himself mentally or physically from that misadventure, and was eventually ravaged by it. He couldn't walk a straight line sober, and on the rare occasion that we let him drive — always a frightening experience — we'd get pulled

over for DUI on the way to the bar. I could have thrown Miguel a long way, but wouldn't have trusted him for a fraction of it.
I woke up hot, welted, and miserable. Tom was jostling me — which I hated — and there was a retching sound in the distance. Apparently some gluttonous mosquitoes had exploited a breach in the net through which they profited; devouring me in a night-long frenzy. Insult was then added to morning injury when Tom dropped the bomb on me. "I think Miguel is dying," he pronounced in a cool, detached manner. "WHAT!?" I looked towards what the Sri Lankans called a head and there I saw half of Miguel's scrawny little body spilling out into the hall; the other half, providing the distant retching sound, was getting religion. Tom sat down on one of the two chairs and related to me these nocturnal incidents.

Miguel had ventured out with the reluctant Sri Lankan men in search of opiates. They returned shortly afterward and Miguel revealed a small origamic package which contained the substance. He unfolded the package exposing what looked like a couple of eight-balls of brown crystal. With alacrity, he elected a president and reverently bowed over the mound seeking inspiration. The Sri Lankan guides, apprehensive of his folly, raised eyebrows at each other in such utter amazement that the balding one appeared to, momentarily, have a full head of hair.

You see, Miguel had experience with that New York heroin; a substance that's been stepped on so many times that the Reagan administration had it classified as a vegetable. This junk, however, was pure as the driven snow; Miguel, in his passion, had just ingested enough heroin to pacify a large draft animal. Rather than samahdi, he nearly anesthetized himself into the tunnel of dead kin. It didn't take long for things to get interesting. The Sri Lankan men backed out of our room, bowing all the while, explaining that they'd check in with us on the morrow. Within ten minutes of the event, Miguel staggered out of the room, speaking in tongues, with Tom in tow as a sort of chronicler. Tom followed Miguel out into the well-kept front yard where he commenced to toss cookies all over the manicured, British-looking hedges. This, explained Tom, was much to our proprietors' chagrin as they had decided to serve the evening meal out on the porch — yes, all the other guests were in attendance — and Miguel was displaying old food not fifteen feet from new, while all looked on in horror.

Tom finally managed to drag Miguel back to our room where he continued to vomit throughout the night. He vomited until he became pale and cadaver-like, providing Tom with the impetus to rouse me. Quickly, now, we had to make a decision. If Miguel died

on our hands we'd be up to our ears in brass and there would be all sorts of embarrassing investigations. Who knows, they'd probably be looking for a fall-guy, and Leavenworth, which is, of course, run by the descendants of Moloch, wouldn't be out of the question. While we discussed our situation, Miguel wobbled out and fell on the room's only table, annihilating it. That was the kicker; we called the Sri Lankans, packed Miguel into the cab, and told our guides to see that he was delivered to the ship. Let the Navy take care of him, we thought. No sooner did we have Miguel out of our hair, Tom walked up to me jamming the silver tray into my face and said, "You want to try it?" The guy had nerve.

Reflux... I was fast becoming third person omniscient. I watched a youth's milky body retching into the toilet from down the hall, and it was me. Reflux... Tom attempted speech but the resulting din produced in me an image of two dogs barking in a washroom. Flailing, he worked himself into a frenzy of gesticulation, vainly trying to communicate some cryptic message. I reeled back in horror, but the guides, who had by then returned, spoke his language fluently. " The zoo," they said. " He wants to go to the zoo." Tom shrugged in frustration as we piled into the cab. We hurtled down primitive dirt paths; the guides directed our attention to points of interest: " Buddha attained enlightenment there...Buddha discoursed here...Buddha slept over there." Christ, Buddha got around like Washington. Does a dog have the Buddha nature? Does a dog have any wool? Hummn, strange koans, thought I. Not to worry , though, so long as I could rub my nose. I was a veritable nose rubbing connoisseur. And the cab skidded into the zoo.

Intuition in ascension ... fences in disrepair, and ignored by all — including the animals which wandered unattended, bartering for concessions...biologically incorrect animals, mutants; strange hydra-headed, bovine eyed beasts that pled with us for victuals... their young, huddled in dim corners conspiring against us...Tigers waited patiently... slashed flowers yield strange fruits... Huge, rearing cobras hissing to be stroked... ancient Egyptians danced through counter-clockwise in karmic processions... Dragons, Geese, and Pearls... women, heavily clad, hid cool shoulders... a grim parade... and the horse ran away with the spoon —

Whew! We bade our guides farewell at the very dock that welcomed us; much to our dipsomaniacal chagrin the beast bobbed nearby. We passed familiar sailors broaching sad stories of on board contraband searches. We were intimately familiar with contraband searches; the Navy was not above probing the

orifice to maintain integrity. I begged with Tom — who was in possession — to make an offering here; but he resolved to take his chances — he had become attached, so to speak.

Things change; but oceans change dramatically. The calm water that delivered us was now churning furiously. "Fuck the contraband search," I said, glancing at my stoic mate. "We'll probably never make it back to the ship alive." The gods were angry. We made it to the ship without incident, but we still had to contend with the transfer from liberty launch to gang-plank; an incredibly dangerous undertaking in foul weather. On the gang-plank were several boatswain mates — dregs of the high tech seas — to assist in boarding. In successive moments on the rough seas we alternated from being ten feet above the platform to ten feet below it. Between the ship and the liberty launch — Davy Jones. It's a matter of timing your step off the launch as you rise relative to the ship; stepping off as you descend would be akin to stepping out of a crashing plane. Naturally, I mistimed my step. Later, witnesses estimated that my face hit that boatswain mate in the crotch at upwards of forty miles per hour. He got over it, eventually.

Once in the contraband search lines, I avoided Tom like the plague. I imagined if he were found out, and the heroin exposed, a maelstrom would develop, sucking all nearby into the vortex. The Navy was somewhat conservative when it came to heroin. Lo and behold, sailors from our own division had been assigned to the search. We skipped through like VIP's and were down into the safe bowels before you could say... Reflux...

Heard a nightingale...drifted over subliminal paradiso... where griffins and centaurs were my subjects... Landing the front two legs of the chair, I opened my eyes and gave my nose a sound rubbing. Tom sat tyrant like, a picture of glazed concentration, not three feet away. He was grinning at me like a Cheshire cat; I leered back contemptuously.

"Where next," his voice cracked.

"Thailand," I responded, annoyed. " All the Zen monks in Kyoto can't stop us now."

And the ship made wake of the sea; steaming for comfortable mores; and where the sticks were said to be potent, reasonable. The moon was the night's pearl, dragons gently whispered, and the geese wagged south.

CONNECTIN'

It was laid-up loafing,
mercy in a corner,
topped black in hide,
color tassels and cords,
a conga carved hard,
chopped,
ebonied
elder.

I just had to hold,
'n hear it swung low
pressin my side,
as each palm smooth,
rhythm-kissed hide,
birthing brown black tones,
old kin-holler cries,
hpoombuhptoom!

And she; who I
knew just a minute;
brightened, rose, ouchsmiling
sensu-memr'y-eyed, misted;
swaying AfriLatican hips
through breaths
of palms'
kisses.

Like her haven't we
known our
hip's brain's certainty
to nudge forth and sway
warming joints,
near and around
a drum
beat?

MICHAEL • J • GRIFFIN
UNTITLED

MARIKA • HOVING
UNTITLED

JEFF • WALLS
UNTITLED

JEFF • WALLS
UNTITLED

STEPHEN • BAILEY
UNTITLED

STEPHEN • BAILEY
UNTITLED

UGLINESS CAN HAVE GREAT BEAUTY

I'm in love with my ugliness,
I don't want moral plastic surgery.

I'm not ugly as ashes. I am ugly because
there is a disaster
happening inside me.
I feel as single as bereft
as a dead child. Who can I turn to?
There is nothing physically wrong
or spiritually but my tearing
of my fingernails alerts one to the cloud
of random collapse for no reason.

I'm reasonless in an unreasoning world.
I work, I play, I make love
to myself—I enjoy my body.

Yet, there is something pulling me down
tighter than money. I spend twenty dollars
regularly on books to find the answers,
I end in the same bind-
ing. There is no escape from
slashes that go deep
leading me into the road over the cliff.

I fish on Sundays—I hook myself
on dope, stupid as my smile.
The walk to the end of the plank is short but
not the way to go. Instead I
should find what moves the rest to
have children. To take care of children,
to care for parents, to clean
the litter box. To take joy in
something as ugly as a turd.

Paper hearts, we need paper hearts
that we can burn as we burn. Smoking
ashes we create.

FALL HARVEST, 1993

The quiet hysteria in fall,
the first inching sense of doom
and I know I am as high as the Prudential,
squinting to see the gorgeous girls walk by
in flaming colors. I sink into plaid,
my checkered life comes to bloom,
alerted by the brightness of lipstick
the allergic air spinning around the tables
at Au Bon Pain in Harvard Square.

Sensuous mysticism boiling out
of coffee, the intensity of school
the sharp black boots, the stride
of handsome college men who prey
on bookshops, diggin' up the pages
that apply, and their calculated gazes at
the freshmen girls, high on their youth
blitzed by the sun, striking out
for the first time with originality
doting on their friends, taking flyers
offered like spoor for them to absorb
in their white, white button-down shirts.

Who are we? As we gather up the leaves of
yesterday, playing
with the pages of Vogue, seeing women who
look so foreign, dressed in common clothes
and we pull our scarves closer, pressing
our ears, mucus in our throats

we feel the cross of age, even at thirty-
five, when we are still young to the world
sliding along the sidewalks, feeling
as removed as a mop, the air pungent like
mouthwash. We stop at the curb, watch
the traffic go, taxis gleaming with money
black umbrellas hooked on
the smoking girls, saying they will never die,
the sun smugly ironic

and a dog trotting, smelling
while his master, with a cigarette,
smooths down his tie
lumbers in his raincoat

to the island of magazines in the central
part of the Square, glancing
at the headlines, Clinton's Health
Plan—classic as a fire
Senators burning up the floor.

AMOUR

Love; We stand on floors
worn as a coat
rebuilt as suits of l'amour.
It's all based on the premise
that what we love
will never go away. We've
been torn by affection, seduced
by good looks, what we aspire
is higher than wings,
blond hair harsher.
I'm one happy in love,
we patter on the bed, reach
beneath sheets, lightly
lying on our love, red
as a cardinal, birds
who mate for life—love drumming.
We are music
building power. Unfortunately we
undermine the mattress
on which we lie, pour
a foundation under
rickety stairs; we take
the steps and grasp the handrail.
Slide down the bannister
to tomorrow when
sticky with love
I burst from the bathroom
holding my roll
with your name
inscribed on every sheet.

COLD X-RAYS

He walks that hospital corridor
tasting a fountain,
a dull fountain.

Now, the river
laid out like a prayer,
stars cool as x-rays.
Doctors say here,
growing, an insect—
rotten regrets that
eat him.

The Saint Lawrence is
what memory is.
His girlfriend, friends
drop from the night
with light faces.

"Come back to home ripe as a
melon, to your toy train,
to a suitcase full of blocks."

"Oh, visit your school halls
the rooms you lay naked...
held a cake leaking honey."

The night will tremble like the sun
through the trees, a bird
in the wind, your hand
on my grave.

SERMON

"OK, everybody, let's have prayer and recess!"

Forty-three chairs went back so fast and hard that the sound was still in the air when Mr. Abernathy began to pray. He never did wait for everyone to stand tall, like Mr. Watson used to; he was up with head bowed even as he started to speak. If you had half a memory you could figure out which of his three recess prayers he was going to say; this day it was the one about keeping the kids safe for the glory of God. Timothy shrugged to himself as the schoolhouse sighed "Amen," and decided it could be worse, they could end up like the missionaries in *Through Gates of Splendor*, the ones who had their heads cut off after ministering to the savages in South America. But of course, later the savages all became Christians so it worked out, but Timothy decided that he preferred to be kept safe for the glory of God than to die for it.

He waited for Leon to pass his cubicle before he started to move for the door. As usual Leon had forgotten to wear his clip-on tie, and his shirt's open collar exposed his dingy white T-shirt and the faint, ever present sweat marks that ran along its neck. Timothy made sure his own tie was secure as Leon slowed his pace and together they exited the little slatboard schoolhouse/function hall into the steamy Florida day.

"Leon, where's Turnbull Bay?" Timothy asked softly.

Leon wrinkled his skinny nose, as if to sniff it out. "Dunno really. Why?"

Timothy squinted up at the naked sun and nearly stumbled down the steps before he replied. "Well," he said as he recovered his balance, "I'm just curious why we're called the Turnbull Bay Baptist Church, and the Turnbull Bay Christian Academy, when we aren't anywhere near a bay?"

Leon shrugged as they turned off the bare concrete steps and headed for the walking field. "I dunno, but we're near water. Maybe there's some old pirates' bay around somewhere, and we're named after that?"

"Naw. We wouldn't name our church after pirates." He looked up at the sun again as they fell in behind three young girls in the trademark navy skirts, white blouses, and red vests. "I'll ask Preacher tomorrow; he probably knows."

"Yeah." Leon looked over at him. "Why'nt you ask your dad?"

Timothy shrugged. "I'll ask Preacher. He wants to talk to me about something. He'll know."

By now most of the students were circuiting the big, sandy field that sprawled out lazily behind the schoolhouse. Depending on the season, it was a football field, a baseball diamond, a jamboree camp, or a Fifth Sunday Fellowship site. But at 10:30 A.M. and 1:45 P.M. on weekdays, it became the walking field. Timothy watched his fellow students saunter casually around the field, talking of this or that, a couple of them praying, one or two trying to get away with holding hands, which was usually OK as long as they kept a few feet apart and swung their arms between them. Randy Colvin and Mr. Abernathy's daughter Norma were trying to rub their shoulders together as they held hands, but Timothy knew they'd probably get away with it.

Leon noticed what Timothy was looking at and kind of smiled. "That Randy Colvin's got Jesus' good luck, don't he?"

"I guess. I don't like that Norma much, though."

Leon's eyes widened. "You don't? I think she's real cute!" The light in Leon's eyes shifted as he watched Norma's skirt undulate subtly, brushing itself and her hip against Randy Colvin's cheap, navy polyester slacks.

"Hey. . ." Timothy elbowed him gently.

"Yeah." Leon looked down at the ground; they were near the far fence now, the one that kept the woods from invading the open space. Skinny tree limbs overburdened by the humidity rested themselves on the chain link barrier. Timothy usually liked to pluck a fresh leaf from them when he could, but he was on the inside path today so he just stared at them as he and Leon walked by.

Leon looked up once they turned back towards the schoolhouse. "You goin' to be on the baseball team again?"

Timothy nodded. "Of course."

"What position you like?"

Timothy shrugged. "I don't know. Catcher, maybe."

"You want to be the catcher again?"

"I guess."

Leon's nose wrinkled again. "Don'cha know?"

"No, not really."

A bit of a laugh caught in Leon's throat. "What position's your daddy want you to play?"

"Third base."

"Un-huh." They both went back to looking at the ground. The sunshine was fierce and every so often it made a few grains of the sandy dirt sparkle, as if long ago someone had broken bottles into so many small pieces that they became one with their cousins again, left there waiting to be imagined into gemstones. Timothy smiled as they left the dirt path for the dying grass that

marked the south border of the field. Leon kicked an anthill as they entered their second lap. "What'd you bring for lunch today?"

* * *

Once, on their way to a revival meeting the previous year, Timothy has gotten to ride with Mr. Watson in his Cadillac. To Timothy, the Cadillac was a wondermobile; it was much quieter than his family's Buick, yet larger, larger than any car owned by any other member of the congregation. In the car was Timothy, Mr. Watson, Randy Rideout, and someone from the church who Timothy couldn't remember, but the point was that he and Randy Rideout were poking around in the backseat and they found the gun. It was a good-sized one; it looked like a submachinegun. It was big and transparent red and the stopper at the back where you filled it was real rubber, not that plastic cork that wears itself useless after a month. Randy just stared at it, while Timothy pretended he was leading the Mercenaries of the Lord into the jungle to find those godless headhunters who made martyrs for a living. He pointed it at the back of Mr. Watson's seat and made some amazingly realistic machinegun sounds with his tongue.

"BdddddBRAMM! BdddddBRAMM!" He pointed it down and expertly mimicked changing the non-existent clip. He played with the mock safety and laid it in his lap like he was guarding something.

"Mr. Watson, how come you got a squirt gun in your car?"

Mr. Watson grinned and his ruddy face lightened. "Well, I take that down to the beach with me on my days off, and when I get bored or I see someone acting impolitely, why I just squirt'em and shout out, 'Hey you, Jesus loves you, so stop looking at that poor girl like she's two plates of hot ribs!'"

Timothy and Randy laughed; the church person looked at the gun, then at Mr. Watson, and said, "Really?"

Mr. Watson nodded. "Oh yeah." He rested his left arm on the open window beside him and grinned even wider. "Works real good on tourists too." He laughed and swiveled his head a bit so that the wind would blow his hair into place. "I remember this one couple, both white as soap, were walking by and they stopped and asked me, 'Where can you get something to soothe the skin?' and I said, 'Well, right here,' and I whipped it out from under the towel and wet 'em down good. Jesus-My-Saviour, they ran so fast!" He laughed louder and so did Timothy and Randy Rideout, even though they knew that if they ever admitted to

such a thing they'd get yelled at.

On the day Preacher Forrest came into the schoolhouse to tell everyone that Mr. Watson had resigned, Timothy remembered that day in the car, and he wondered if those tourists had told on Mr. Watson.

* * *

Friday afternoon was cloudy for once so Timothy headed straight home. All the deacons' sons had tossed their navy blue ties over the schoolhouse railing and were playing basketball, taking care not to get their shirts dirty as they knocked each other down. Timothy ran past them to the church parking lot and dodged murky puddles as he crossed to the crumbling tarmac roadway. He jogged the four house-lengths to his home, running along the newly hoed borders of the trim lawn to the path of slippery stones that led from the driveway to the front door. The screen door was shut and the inside door was open, and loitering raindrops were diving from the low, wide eaves of the house to the saturated grass below. Timothy squeezed between two trickles of water and with a brief drag of his feet over the doormat trotted through the barely-furnished living room to his bedroom.

An unmade bed, a four-drawer chest, and a seven-drawer desk filled the tiny room. Each one was done in a different finish, each scuffed and rickety. Timothy walked right up to the desk and pulled his Bible and sermon pad from their special drawer, middle on the left. He fell onto his bed and looked over the mess of Scripture references and fat scrawled words. Rolling onto his stomach he jammed his elbows under his chest, then reached into his pocket for a pencil. It was broken so he tossed it under the bed and pulled out another one, this one tipped with a thin streak of sharp lead. He chewed the eraser carefully and thoroughly as he studied the scribblings, not noticing the sun's gradual retreat from the window over his desk.

By the time the scent of boiling potatoes and frying porkchops entered his room he had erased most of the words and reformed them as careful block letters, writing out of the margins and stacking thin sentences on top of each other between the lines. He rubbed the last of the old words out and left the gaps, dropping his pencil onto some old underwear before leaping out of bed and bounding out to the kitchen.

"Done!" he cried as he rounded the dinner table and entered the kitchen.

"Oh, I didn't know you were home," his mother replied. She

was stirring the potatoes and peas alternately with a darkly-stained wooden spoon. Beside her, Timothy's daddy was sloshing the porkchops around in a big frying pan with a loose handle, dissolving corn starch into their popping juices.

"Wanna hear?" Timothy thumbed the edge of the page as he stood there, shifting from foot to foot.

"Sure, son." His daddy looked up long enough to nod over his tilted glasses, then returned to the porkchops, carefully sprinkling a yellowish powder onto them and swishing the thickening gravy around them.

"OK." Timothy dried his hands on his pants and spread his legs a bit, then cleared his throat loudly. "One thing I have noticed when I read my scriptures is that . . ." his mother banged her spoon against the lip of the potato pot, ". . . about Jesus. But Jesus is our Saviour so I wonder why there is this . . ." his daddy mashed the chops with a big metal spatula and they shrieked, droplets of grease exploding into the air. He then picked up a knife and started hammering at an onion. "Where can we find them?" Timothy paused; his mother moved around his daddy's onion pounding and pulled a short stack of heavy, clanking plates from the shelf awkwardly balancing them as she shifted position again and half-dropped them on the table. "Sooooo. . ." Timothy said loudly, ". . . if we look in the second chapter of Mark, we can see just what it is Jesus wants us to know and do as good soldiers. In the . . ." The plates groaned against one another as his mother separated them and slid one in front of each chair. She then pulled open the silverware drawer and extracted a tangle of forks and spoons from it. They clanked and chattered as she pulled three of each from the cluster and dropped them beside each plate. The pace of his daddy's ministrations increased as he started to dice the onion, the knife's strikes echoing off of the white plastic cutting board.

"SOOOOOO. . ." Timothy said, then stopped. His mother yanked the potato pot from the stove and dumped its contents into a skinny tin colander in the sink. His father scooped up the onions with one hand and flung them into the sizzling beige mess in the frying pan.

"HEY!"

Timothy's parents looked up, his mother wide-eyed, his daddy in pre-sneer. "You watch that tone of voice, young man!" he said rapidly. He swished the porkchops one more time, then poured them into a shallow ceramic platter.

"You're not listening," Timothy mumbled.

"Yes we are," his mother replied. She dumped the potatoes into a scratched plastic bowl and placed them on the table. She

moved behind Timothy's daddy and opened the fridge.

"OK, put that away until after supper," his father said briskly.

With a slight nod Timothy picked up his sermon pad and walked back to his room, tossing it on the floor by yesterday's socks. When he came back out he sat quietly at the table as his father said grace, purposefully keeping one eye open and not saying "Amen" at the end.

* * *

Preacher was late coming in the next day so Timothy amused himself by looking at the upcoming movie flyers on the bulletin board. Two of them were documentaries, one of how some Witnesses for Christ were being tortured in Africa, and another about how much the missionaries in Asia suffered, both from living in net tents and from being killed by local Orientals who did the Devil's work by silencing God's Word. Unfortunately, you had to be eighteen to see those two films. He could, however, see *A Distant Thunder*, which was about the Rapture. It was going to be shown that afternoon, right after the Bible Study group. His daddy would probably let him stay and see it, unless he wanted him to play badminton with Junior Forrest.

Preacher came in just then, and smiled big when he saw Timothy waiting for him. "Well Praise Jesus, there's a Soldier of the Lord guarding this tabernacle! Are you waitin' for me, young soldier?"

"Yessir." Timothy nodded and took his eyes off of the picture of the young Oriental Christian who was having bamboo shoots slid under his fingernails. He looked up at Preacher, who smiled at him through his sunglasses.

"Well good. Come on in to my office, young soldier."

Preacher unlocked his office door and ushered Timothy inside. As Preacher walked around him Timothy stopped at the large painting that hung by the door. It had a simple wooden frame and a tiny brass plaque at the bottom that said, "The Day of Glory." It was an angel's eye view of the Rapture, done in crude, hasty oils. A highway curved around a hill to a city, and the sky was striped with multicolored light pouring from a huge hole in the sky, and cars were crashing as peoples' souls were ripped from their bodies and they were pulled up to the hole by their faces. In the city, an airliner had slammed into a building, and more souls were being sucked heavenward. Even more souls were flowing from the buildings and the streets, all streaming towards the hole of light in the sky.

But the detail that most caught Timothy's attention was on

one of the hills above the highway. A family was having a nice Sunday picnic; they all sat on a checkered cloth and were right in the middle of eating, except that the mother and the son were smouldering piles of ash, and their souls were jetting eagerly towards Paradise. The two little girls and the father hadn't even had time to look up from their fried chicken and salad yet, but the family dog was barking so loudly that you could see the sound coming out of his mouth in harsh lines and bright orange, like a gun going off.

So, Timothy wondered, where the sun was while all this was going on?

"Like that one, do you?" Preacher asked with a grin.

"Yessir." Timothy nodded carefully and walked to the chair in front of Preacher's desk. He sat in it and adjusted his shirt, then looked up at Preacher with his glasses on the edge of his nose.

The clock ticked for several seconds before Preacher spoke. "Well Timothy, how are you today?"

Timothy shrugged and stared at his hands. "OK, sir."

Preacher nodded. "How are the kindergartners?"

Timothy shrugged. "OK."

"What lesson did you teach on Wednesday?"

"The Good Shepherd."

Preacher nodded and pursed his lips wisely, straightening his shoulders a bit to look impressed. "That's a gooood lesson. My wife loves to teach that one." He picked up a pen, put it back down again. "How's your schoolwork coming?"

Timothy looked determined. "Alright. I'm ahead in my history."

"How're your scriptures?"

Timothy brightened. "I got 315; I'm only three behind John Spengler!" He pushed himself up straight in the seat and stopped playing with his tie.

Preacher smiled and nodded again. "Well good; I'm glad to hear that." The smile faded quickly and he picked up the pen. It was silver and the office lighting made it wink. "Mr. Abernathy has told me. . . ."

"Preacher," Timothy said suddenly, "why did Mr. Watson leave?"

". . . that you've been rather. . .what?"

Timothy huffed and held on to the armrests of the chair. "Um, how come Mr. Watson, um, left?"

Preacher smiled, showing all of his teeth this time. He massaged his chin with his right hand and his wedding band glistened as it was rubbed over his faintly stubbled jawline. Preacher was tall and thin, with a narrow face and a smile that nearly cut it in half. "Well," he said quietly, "Mr. Watson resigned."

"Why?"

Preacher laughed a little and played with the pen for a minute. "Timothy, do you remember what Paul said about obedience?"

Timothy looked away for a moment, then looked back at Preacher and nodded. "Yessir, he said. . ."

Preacher held up his ringless hand; the gold watch on his wrist glistened. "I know you know. I just wanted to remind you of it." He grinned again. "Sometimes we just have to trust the Lord about things we don't understand. It's God's Plan. Are you a good soldier?"

"Yessir."

"Well then alright. The Lord is our King, and Jesus is our Shepherd. So we just have to follow him, OK?"

"OK." Timothy nodded once and pushed his glasses back up his nose, leaving a greasy fingerprint on the right lens.

"Jesus loves us; do you love Jesus?"

"Yessir."

"Well alright then. Whyn't you run off home and work on your Bible awhile, and pray a bit. I'll talk to you later."

"But. . ." Timothy smushed his lips together and gripped the arms of his chair.

Preacher arched his left eyebrow and smirked with the right side of his mouth. "But you want to see the movie today, don't you?"

Timothy nodded, his glasses sliding back to the end of his nose.

Preacher twirled his pen for a moment, then smiled again, slowly. He blinked lazily and when the smile was complete he nodded. "All right then. But. . ." Timothy froze as he slid off the chair. He could feel Preacher's warning finger wiggling in the air behind him. Timothy turned and looked over his shoulder. ". . . you better have a humdinger of a sermon ready for the old folks this Sunday. Your daddy and I are counting on you. What are you teaching?"

"Um, 'We Are All Disciples of Jesus'?"

Preacher let his teeth show. "Good." He laid the finger to rest and covered it with his other hand. "Jesus has a good disciple in you, Timothy." He leaned back and waved. "Enjoy the movie, y'hear?"

Timothy nodded and quickly walked out of the office. As he passed the painting he looked at the family on the hill, and realized that they didn't really have faces, just splotches of orangy paint with a few black scratches for eyes and mouths. The cars were soft and some of them didn't have wheels. The streaming souls were just pale dots with lines drawn back to the ground.

And dogs, Timothy thought as he left the church, don't bark like gunshots.

* * *

The guillotine startled Timothy and it took him a minute to realize that the movie was over. Leon watched the collapsible screen reverently as the big THE END exploded onto it. He crunched the last ice cube and rattled the last kernels of popcorn from the cup into his mouth, then swallowed hard. "Wow," he whispered.

Timothy shifted in his metal chair and scratched his left ear. "They killed them. They killed all the martyrs."

Leon nodded. "Well. . . yeah. They had to. They were part of the 144,000; they had to be killed. Satan couldn't let them live." The lights began to crackle and hum. Timothy and Leon got up and folded their chairs, then dragged them over to the storage closet at the back of the hall, where there were several other people in line to put their chairs away. Leon kept shaking his head as they waited to put their chairs on the well-worn racks that Deacon Stamper had made before his stroke. As they left the hall the lights came on.

"Would you want to be one of the 144,000?" Leon asked as they walked into the sunshine.

Timothy shrugged. "I don't know. It's scary. Remember Preacher Tucker, the evangelist?"

"Yeah."

Timothy nodded. "Well, he said that Jesus is coming back on May 14, 1981."

Leon's eyebrows scrunched together. "So soon? But doesn't the Number of the Beast have to happen first?"

"Supposed to." They walked out to the parking lot. Leon's brother-in-law was lying on the hood of his Gremlin, asleep. He wasn't wearing a collared shirt and his sneakers were dirty. They slowed their pace as they approached him.

"D'you think that's what it'll be like?"

"Maybe." Timothy squinted up at the sun. "I have to go work on my sermon some more."

Leon nodded. "OK. Should I bring you cheeseburgers on Monday?" Leon's mother worked at McDonald's and she brought home the leftovers every night.

"Sure. I can forget my lunch, I think." They nodded at each other and parted, hands in pockets. Leon's brother-in-law slid off the hood and opened the car door for Leon with an exaggerated bow. He was Methodist and he didn't always go to church. Timothy wondered what that was like as he walked home, but he kept seeing the guillotine fall on the pretty girl martyr's neck. He decided that he'd rather be one of the dots in the painting than be a martyr; martyrs got their homes and Bibles taken away and were chased by somber men in brown vans that said "ONE WORLD GOV'T" on the side in white stick-on letters. He shook his head as he walked up the driveway; you had to think too much to be a martyr.

The house was empty but unlocked. He put his ear to the living room wall but heard nothing; sometimes his daddy was in the walk-in closet taping his Saturday morning radio sermon. He was probably out visiting senior citizens, talking them into coming to the Sunday afternoon service at the Serene Palms Senior Center. Timothy grimaced—his Sunday afternoon service.

He went into his room and pulled the sermon out. He pursed his lips and started whispering it, but after a few sentences it trailed off. He sat on the edge of the bed, staring at the yellow paper and the white erased streaks he had written over. He tried using his thumb as a microphone, but he still couldn't do more than whisper. He frowned and looked around for something to use.

He nodded to himself, hopped off the bed, and walked across the hall to his parents' bedroom. As usual the closet door was closed. He opened it carefully, peeking through the space between the hinges to make sure no one was in there. Hung clothes lined each wall, and old boxes were stacked beneath them. In front of the workshirts was an overturned milk crate, a tape recorder, and a little microphone. Timothy smiled to himself and walked in.

He whispered initially, but after the first few minutes he found that it was easy to speak louder, and soon he was in a full preacher's voice, exhorting his flock to righteousness. He even got up off the milk crate and walked around, sometimes tossing an arm up to make a point. It took no time at all, it seemed, before he read off the final words and bowed his head in prayer. The words were fine, he decided. And it was still early.

There were a lot of boxes in the closet, and after a moment of congratulation Timothy walked over to one stack and opened the

top one. Shoes. He wrinkled his nose and set that one aside. His daddy used to have some Time-Life gangster books; where could they be?

Four boxes later the most exciting thing he found were some old stuffed animals. "Wrong stack," he muttered, so he walked on his knees to the stack behind the milk crate. The top box was an old cardboard box with the flaps crossed over each other, so that when you opened one corner the others all came flying up. Timothy slid it off the stack; it was heavy, and he heard paper. He nodded and smiled, and popped it open.

The top magazines were *Penthouse*, with a few *Playboys* mixed in. Beneath those were others with slicker covers that had naked people tied up. Timothy bit his lip and flipped through them, one by one. One section in particular caught his eye; the naked women were posed like mannequins, and with each picture they came more and more to life, and they moved over to each other, and slid their tongues up each others' legs, and they pulled each other to the ground and . . .

Awhile later he found some paperbacks at the bottom of the box, but the titles didn't make sense. He couldn't read them; the words were wrong; there just weren't words like that anywhere. Even the magazine titles didn't make sense; what was a *Playboy*, anyway? So he quickly, neatly, stacked everything back in the box, closed it, made sure the corner with the black magic marker scrawl was on top, and lifted it back into place. Then he sat there and stared at it.

The closet's air was turning grey when he heard the keys in the front door. He quickly got up, closed the door, and scampered to his room. He heard his parents come in and go to their room, and he wondered if he had moved the microphone or the milk crate by mistake. Had he put all the magazines back? He waited until they went to the kitchen, then crept back in, opened the closet door a bit, and double-checked, He saw the box, half-hidden by the milk crate. He wanted to open it back up again, but he heard them folding grocery bags and knew they'd be back. He crept back into his room and put his sermon away.

* * *

The previous summer he had been the catcher for the school baseball team, and on a particularly important play in one game he had jumped from his spot as soon as the ball was hit, stood up, moved right, and pulled his mask off as he looked up to follow the ball. The slugger's flying bat had hit him square on his windpipe, and he had lain there gagging while a double play had

taken place on the field. No one noticed until the next batter came up, and then he had been removed from the field with the usual scattered sympathy applause. Mr. Watson had taken him to the water fountain and examined his neck, squatting on his haunches to be at the same height.

"You look fine, son; you're a survivor," he said, slapping Timothy on the back and making him cough.

"You mean soldier," Timothy had replied.

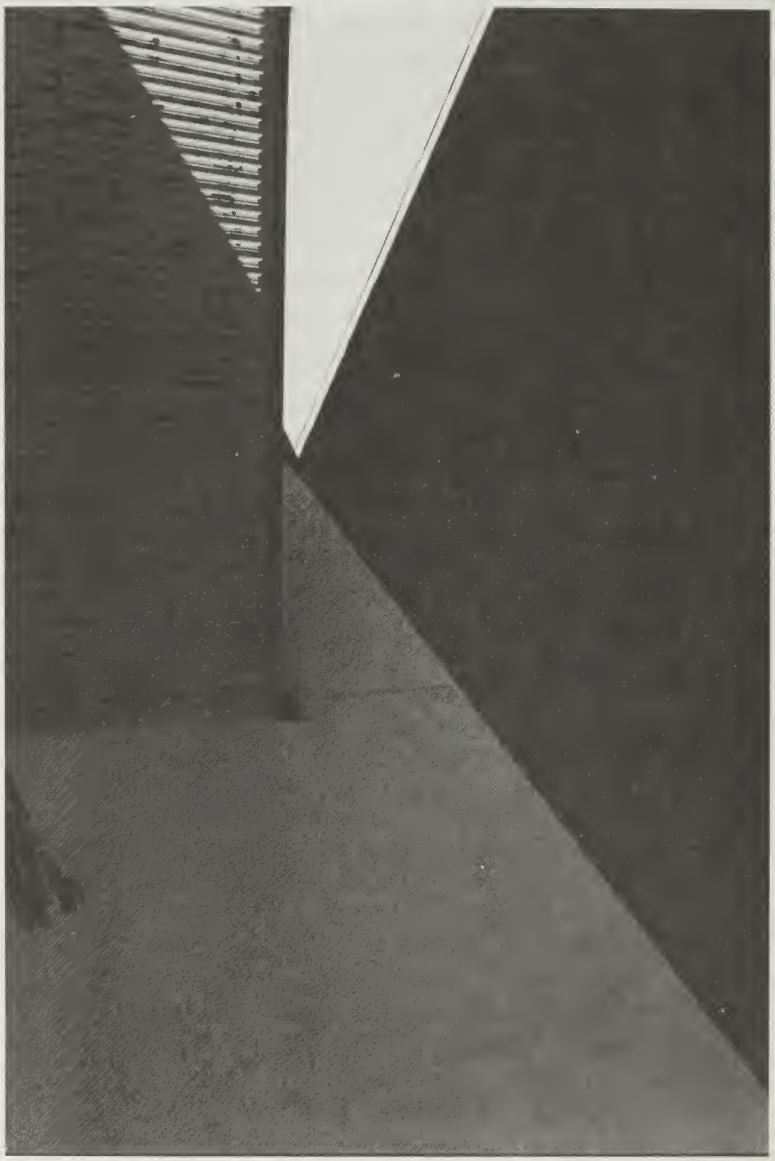
Mr. Watson grunted and turned his head to look at the other side of Timothy's neck. "Soldier, schmoldier. Two things about religion you should know, son. There ain't no soldiers and there ain't no winners."

"Sir?" Timothy turned to face him and winced.

Mr. Watson just grinned. "Nothin', son. You're a good boy; you just keep bein' a good boy, and don't let anything steer you bad." Then he stood up and led Timothy by his shoulder back to the field. "I'd rather know you as a good boy than as a good soldier; just keep to that."

Timothy opened his mouth to ask another question, then closed it and shook his head. Mr. Watson gave a laugh and roughed Timothy's crewcut, then started shouting at some kids in the bleachers who were throwing food.

The night after he opened the box, Timothy stayed awake long after he had turned his light out, and after he had used a flashlight to read his newest Indians book. He put his pillow in a headlock and rocked quietly in his bed. He could remember each image from the box, even the strange book titles. He had never known about what was under girls' underwear, and he thought about going back into the closet next Saturday to see again. Was there more to see? He gripped the pillow more tightly. But wasn't that fornication? He wasn't sure; Preacher never said quite what fornication was in his sermons. Timothy just knew that it had to do with women, and what they had. But what about the mother in the painting? What about Mr. Watson? What about the pretty martyr? He thought about the light in Leon's eyes when Norma Abernathy walked by, and he wondered what she had under her skirt. Did Randy Colvin know? He sighed and rolled over, wondering how his sermon would turn out tomorrow.



LORENA•TURNER
UNDERSTANDING~GEOMETRY # 5

JEFF • HOVIS
UNTITLED

JEFF • HOVIS
UNTITLED

JEFF • HOVIS
UNTITLED

JULIAN • HILL
UNTITLED

JULIAN • HILL
UNTITLED

THE HORSE IN THE BASEMENT

Cottage Street
Stark white duplex
Concrete steps
Two floors, four rooms
Salvation Army furniture
No food in the refrigerator
Dirty dishes in the sink

Horse in the basement
Tied up with a rubber hose
Mother's down with it—
That's why sister and I are alone
Eight years old—
Wondering, wondering—
The pangs of hunger
Will not subside

The police are knocking—
"Open up it's a raid!"
The horse is in the basement
Don't blame my mother
She's trying to make
The horse quiet down

No food in the house
Dirty dishes in the sink
The horse is gone—
But it waits
In some unknown stable
To run again

. . .AND HER ID WANDERED THE STREETS OF BOSTON (OR, ON A MODERN UTOPIA, AND WHY YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE)[1]

I'm sitting at my kitchen table, drinking a glass of lemonade. Clapton's MTV: The Elevator Years is playing on the radio for the seventeenth time today, and I'm wishing fervently that he'd hurry the hell up and come out with another album. But he hasn't, so I persevere, as the only alternative is to have a coronary embolism, and I have to go to work later.

Suddenly, someone sits next to me. I see from the rather large amount of feathers and the long, protruding beak that he's a recurring hallucination of Big Bird I've been having since the age of seven (a result of a steady diet of Elmer's Glue and dried fruit I was on in the first grade).

The radio, unnoticing, continues the forty-second verse of "Layla."

"So tell me," he asks, with the high-and-mighty manner figments of my imagination tend to have, "what are your thoughts on those light beer commercials?"

"Are you referring to the ones where the actors muse on and on about how if life were perfect, and then kneel, praise their gods, and sacrifice small woodland animals for the privilege of being allowed to drink this particular brand of beer that cures gout, hair loss, duodenal ulcers and ingrown toenails, and is therefore as close as humankind is thus far capable of reaching towards perfection?" I inquire.[2]

". . . you got me on my knees," answers the radio.

"Yes, I believe that's the one," says Big Bird.

"Actually, it's never crossed my mind."

* * *

If life were perfect. Well, guess what. It ain't. Live with it.

Anyway, who wants life to be perfect?

Okay, put your hands down. I have news for you.

Perfect is boring.

Let's assume for a moment that we all have the same idea of perfection: a world free of hunger, disease, war, mimes, etc. A place with enchanted butterflies, soda-pop rivers and lollipop trees, and all that. The basic no-frills Paradise package. The very first side effect of such a world? Well, to begin with, small talk as we know it would cease to exist. For example:

Person #1: Er, nice weather we're having.

Person #2: It's the same bloody weather we're always having. Idiot. (Person #2 then proceeds to poke at Person #1 with the eraser end of a pencil until he/she/it goes away.)

Thus, as small talk is deeply ingrained in our subconscious, it would become a truly sad and unhappy place in which to live.[3]

Besides, perfection is almost completely incompatible with human nature. Let's take me, for example. From where I stand, life would be perfect if: a) Diet Dr. Pepper tasted anything even remotely approaching regular Dr. Pepper; and b) I had absolute, unimaginable power over every living thing in the entire universe. Now then. I can think of a person or two who might disagree with some of this.[4] Ergo, they might be somewhat disgruntled. And how can we have disgruntled people (or, from my viewpoint, Traitors to the Imperial Grand Poobah of Everything Imaginable and Other Stuff Besides) in a perfect world? You can't. It stands to reason. Therefore, I have completely and utterly disproved the possibility of perfection. So there.

But let's suppose, for the sake of argument (and as everyone knows, I hate to argue) that a perfect world was possible. "What would such a world be like?" I hear you ask. Highly undesirable. No, I'm not foreseeing any futuristic dystopias in which a gullible society is ordered about by a charismatic figurehead, civilizations found only in the most terrifying of fictions.[5]

I'm worried I'll have to start taking better care of myself.

Think about it. People who exercise every day are probably closer to perfection than, say, me, for whom the day's exercise consists of brushing Cheetos crumbs off my shirt after sliding off the couch. If this is the case, then perfection probably lies with those people who come from the masochistic school of, "If it's painful, it must be good for you."

Moreover, perfection, more likely than not, doesn't lie with those of us poisoning our bodies with red meat even after being told to take it easy by our doctors after having had our third bypass operation at the age of twenty-seven. Rationalizing that I'm as far from perfection as is humanly possible, the ultimate in human evolution must lie with those people who have one meal a day, consisting of three peas, spring water, and a moist towellette; i.e. perfection lies in starvation by personal choice, and a perfect person can be spotted by his or her tendency to collapse at any given moment. "Look at me. I'm so perfect, I can't hold my goddamn spoon."

Alas, every utopia is built on an underclass—in this case, an underclass of unfit meat-eaters. Given these qualifications, I

have very little difficulty seeing myself made leader of this underclass, and would thus set about fulfilling my duties of making a big hairy nuisance of myself, leading people in a rousing chorus of, "You're Not Living Longer (It Just Seems Longer)," while carrying signs saying "Say What You Will—Asparagus Will Always Taste Like Asparagus." Of course, I'd be dismissed as a troublemaker and an asshole, but I could probably get my own talk show.

Some of you may be thinking, "Say, haven't we strayed from the point a bit?" If I could only remember what the point is, I could give you a more definite answer. (Of course, the rest of you are thinking, "Big deal," as you prepare to turn the page and reach for another Twinkie.)

* * *

"Now then, Big Bird," I asked, "what have you learned?"

He thought for a moment and suggested, "That you feel insecure and less important in the presence of those with more willpower than yourself, i.e., most of the rest of the animal kingdom."

"Shut up and drink your beer."

The radio croons, "Layla . . ." one more time.

FOOTNOTES

1 From Psychology on the Commuter Rail at 8:30 a.m. and Why You Shouldn't Pay Much Attention to It, by the author and V.G. Miller, resident Psych Major, with F.P. Reed, His Extensive Hat Collection, and His Orchestra; copyright 1993, Bronx Cheer Press, South Easton/ Stoughton.

2 From Honestly, I Was Making It All Up, by Sigmund Freud; copyright 1911, Sometimes a Cigar Is Something Really Filthy Publications, Reykjavik.

3 Yes, syntax-watchers, I know "sad" and "unhappy" mean the same thing. It's dramatic, dammit, dramatic!

4 In fact, anyone who doesn't disagree is invited to send any and all contributions, made out to "Cash," to the author, c/o this publication.

5 e.g., 1984, Brave New World, the Reagan Administration, etc.

THE GIFT

—for Katherine

Purple pansies with black
faces: her small hands
don't pick them

She spreads a quilt
in the backyard and shares
a tuna sandwich with
her tortoise-shell cat

Lying back in the clawfoot
tub, her hair fans out
shiny like seaweed

She sleeps with a blanket
tattered yellow with red
hearts and wraps it around
her to keep safe

Brushing my hair away
from my face, she laughs—
"You bald!"

Child of my body
who would I be without
your light touch on my face?

MY HUSBAND'S EAR

While reading the paper at breakfast,
he works at something inside his right ear,
twirling his index finger around and around.

I stand it as long as I can. Finally I ask,
Why are you doing that ?

Bad question. He says his finger keeps stumbling
over something in there. He wants me to look.

I think of the inside of an ear as private:
all those tiny hairs and the waxy dark entrance
to its canals—

And what if I did see something? A cancerous growth,
perhaps, that would need to be removed,
and then when he came home from the hospital,

I'd have to be this cheery person,
tending to the inside of his ear.

I don't want him to be dependent on me: just the thought
of it lessens the space between us where I breathe,

but in the end, I look.

LIVING NEAR THE NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

My husband says when the emergency siren blows,
he'll run outside and take deep breaths—
no lingering death for him. He mimes melting down,
swaying and shrinking in his chair at the table.

My friend, who has recently quit cigarettes,
is smiling. She has a carton
stashed in the basement—intends to go out
chain-smoking.

Her husband hesitates. He's a survivor—can't
imagine giving up, but finally he decides on a bottle
of '61 Margaux, Margaux. He will sip it slowly, trying
not to spill a single drop.

If I had only a few hours left, I'd like to make love
with the man I saw in the elevator this morning—
his eyes were damson blue.

GREENPOINT

We locked the door and smoked
to see where our breath went
in day-lit curls like brown flowers
turning in on themselves. It rose,
sticky with nicotine, and got caught
under the ceiling.

The importance of forty-cent beers:
Gersky's and *Annette's,* the men's fingers
greasy from pork sausages, the smell
of perogies from the kitchens upstairs,
every third round a gift, and lights
strung above the dollar gin like Christmas.
He sang of bars like holidays, sang of bars
like holidays.

The importance of *Mowimy po Polsku:*
She imagined it was Warsaw not Brooklyn
and herself a Jew. She hid in the house
playing cards, quitting cigarettes, cleaning
the bathroom at four in the morning. Her hands
shook for something to hold; she made tea
to go with bread her father brought
from Williamsburg, the last hold-out, the ghetto.

Down Manhattan Avenue, past the beauty school,
the butcher, and the asbestos removal company.
Past the luncheonette, the soda-fountain, and the knish-
seller through McCarren Park to Metropolitan Avenue.
The deli would sell us subway tokens. We took
the L train under the river to play pool in Union Square.
Old men watching said, Angles, angles and spit*; they lit*
cigars like soiled fingers held in their clean white hands.

He could tell of the dead in the park,
of windows breaking and the running of blood,
but he preferred to sing. *Du, du, liegst mir im Herzen.*
He sat all day with his face above a drink
ja, ja, ja, ja, in The Continental.

She recalled places like ancestors:
Canarsie, Bushwick, Flatbush, Red Hook,
all burned away, ashed over, the whole
of Brooklyn down to the water, to Gravesend,
Dead Horse Bay, and Big Fishkill Channel.
Dove sta? she had read somewhere, *Dove sta?*
Not in Brooklyn. Not in Greenpoint.

BLACK WOMAN: THE JEZEBEL CONCEPT

One of the more salient images of black women during the slavery era was of their having an insatiable libido. The white antebellum Southerner conjured up the idea of the black woman as a Jezebel, a female with loose morals. Her whole demeanor reeked of lasciviousness, such that the traditional roles of mother and housewife were foreign to her. Even today, the concept is still such an insidious part of the fabric of American society that popular culture panders to the Jezebel image. She's Got*ta Have It*, the film that put Spike Lee on the national entertainment map, paid homage to the Jezebel character. The lead female role of Nola Darling had not one, not two, but three male lovers who constantly vied for her attention. Nola was portrayed as a woman who needed all three lovers to satisfy her libidinous urges. These men, aware of the others, were helpless under her spell. This film was made in 1987—one hundred and twenty-two years after emancipation—and focused on twentieth century African-Americans. Yet the legend lingers, so entrenched in society's perceptions that even today's filmmakers fall prey to its allure. How this American myth surrounding black womanhood became so firmly embedded in our culture dates back to the impressions Europeans formed during their initial contact with Africans (White 29).

The perception of black women as unusually sensual beings gained credence when the Europeans arrived on Africa's shores to purchase slaves. The tropical climate required that the African wore the least amount of clothing; the Victorian mind misconstrued this semi-nudity for lewdness. The African cultural traditions were similarly misjudged as amoral by the white slave trader. "[P]olygamy was attributed to the Africans' uncontrolled lust, tribal dances were reduced to the level of orgy" (qtd. in White 29). These different standards of behavior—freer mode of dress, and the fact that sexual expressiveness applied to women as well as men—offered palpable truth that African women were promiscuous creatures.

The travelogues of the whites, with their superficial analyses of African life and improvised conclusions, fabricated more fantasy about black women. Ms. Deborah Gray White quotes William Bosman as finding the Guinea Coast women, "fiery and

warm...so much hotter than the men" (qtd. in White 29). William Smith, another explorer, was so inspired by the cultural differences that he described the Guinea women as, " hot constitution'd Ladies...continually contriving stratagems...to gain a lover" (qtd. in White 29). With the passage of time, these subjective accounts became part of the folklore of the American slave system. Southern newspapers touted the insatiable sexual drive of African women which enabled them to make love from sun-down to sun-up. Even Thomas Jefferson seriously proclaimed that black women's licentious nature prompted them to mate with orangutans, and moreover, this animal actually preferred, "the black woman over those of his own species" (qtd. in White 29).

By the nineteenth century ribald gossip about "Negro wenches" was not only common among the Northern and Southern Gentry, but an accepted fact. Ms. White provides a litany of European, Abolitionist, and Southern slave-holders' views of the black woman's sexual prowess. Commentaries ran the gamut from outrageous lies to Puritan self-righteous condemnations and sentimental realism. These assertions stated that slave women invited sexual overtures from white men, that they went into uncontrollable lewd contortions when dancing with the opposite sex, or as one Louisiana planter put it, "there is not one likely-looking black girl in this state that is not the paramour of a white man" (qtd. in White 30). This statement alone clearly added to the myth of the Jezebel.

Ms. White maintains that conditions under which the black bondswomen lived, were sold, and punished helped foster this belief in promiscuity. On some large plantations with absentee owners, the clothing of the slaves was so tattered that women, as well as men, were practically nude. When working in the fields or washing and polishing floors, black women wrapped the long tails of their skirts around their waists to keep them out of the mud and dirt. Given the sexual mores of the day, this exposure of legs and thighs was associated with lewdness. Apparently the fact that the female slave's skirt trailing around her feet was an obvious impediment to the completion of her tasks was not a consideration. Similarly, when being sold, the bondswoman's body was usually exposed and handled to ascertain her child-bearing capacity. To the Southern Gentry public nudity was synonymous with licentiousness. It did not matter that the majority of Southerners never participated in the slave auction; the semi-naked slave woman's body became unconsciously linked with imprudent behavior. The exposure of a woman's body when

being punished elicited the same connotations as well. It was not uncommon for a female slave to be stripped from neck to waist during a whipping. In some situations the woman would be totally nude while being thrashed in public (White 31-33).

While the circumstances under which the black woman lived perpetuated the myth of the Jezebel, the slaveholder and the slave trader consciously or unconsciously created an atmosphere that served to justify the "loose black woman" image. Though many a female slave was raped and forced into intimate relations with the white man, many were not (Genovese 417-423). For some it was a choice between a life of hard labor or one of relative ease. With that type of enticement, few would or could refuse sexual involvement, and the average intelligent woman even dared hope that her body could purchase freedom for herself and her children. For many that was the case. In Charleston, the free black community was comprised mainly of mulatto, quadroon, and octoroon residents. Tragically, once the black woman offered herself to the white man, she confirmed his fantasy of the Jezebel.

Whether or not black women were coerced or entered freely into sexual relationships with white men, there was still a heavy price to pay. "Slavery provided a special kind of cheating, which converted white women into ethereal beings even as it degraded black women into alleged whores" (Genovese 427). The Southern gentleman desperately needed to account for his shameful immoral conduct. The tale of the exceedingly sensuous "black wench's" power to lure him to the slave quarters not only protected the white man's honor but the Southern white woman's virtue. Rare was the white woman who voiced her discontent. It was perhaps less painful to blame the victim than castigate the white man for his indulgences. In her diary, Mary Boykin Chestnut not only expressed her anguish at a system that humiliated and demeaned white women, but also exposed its inherent deception:

> [March 14, 1861] Under slavery, we live surrounded by prostitutes...Who thinks any worst of a Negro or Mulatto women for being a thing we can't name? God forbide us, but ours is a monstrous system, a wrong and iniquity! Like the patriarch of old, our men live in one house with their wives and concubines; and the mulattoes one sees in every family partly resemble the white children. Any lady is ready to tell you who the father of all the mulatto children in everybody's household but her own. Those, she seems to think, drop from the clouds (qtd. in Genovese 426).

Powerless to change their husbands' sexual impropriety, the Southern mistresses found ways to even the score, usually at the expense of the victims of their men's exploitation, the slave women. If the mistress suspected the light-skinned child born to a slave woman was fathered by her husband, arrangements were made to sell the baby. When a child was not involved, the slave woman incurred the daily wrath of the white woman, which could range from verbal taunts to brutal beatings. Inasmuch as black women were debased by the white women's treatment of them, so were their mistresses subjugated by the slave system. The white male defined the roles of white women and of black women, as well as the parameters in which they behaved.

ENDNOTES

White, Deborah Gray. Ar'n't I a Woman?, New York: Norton,1985.

Genovese, Eugene D. Roll Jordan Roll: The World The Slaves Made. New York: Vintage, 1974. See also White, pp. 34-36.

BLINK

Look back: a corridor stacked
with rowdy kids, sad, just smacked
or smug, packing candy, banging
and clapping their noisy little hands
and chucking your books in a puddle
of vomit. All comers babble their facts
onto blank pages for hours packed
with twitches and giggles
and the *pops* of the girls chewing gum
to be tough but who otherwise shine
in white socks and blouse grow dim
when confronted by the *blab blab*
of Mr. Dickens, owner of the world's
longest fly and bad breath.
And the hard boys want to spit
and brawl behind the skips, while others
hide and wait and eat cold rice pudding
with jam in the empty canteen after hours.
And later: a party in Chelsea
where the Heineken flows like the bubbling
gardens of Olympus, where flowing goddesses
lounge on couches, and boys with spots
drink in their different smells
and read their breasts like maps
while ever regretful of that last beer
which kicks around inside their stomach
like a tin can and forces them
to make a mess on Paul Sugathan's mother's
carpet and get ejected.
And later: mixing up a fresh batch
of sand and cement beneath the scaffold
cladding the Victorian on Elgin Crescent,
to the impatient cries of Mick-the-plasterer
in a terrible rush to get the job done
before the rain and really can't be
bothered to deal with a slow bugger
who wouldn't know a fucking thistle board
if it came down and hit him on the fucking
head, which it definitely could
in just a minute if this fucking wall
gets ruined you dumb cunt.

And later: back to Barbara's
where the first time awaits, perhaps,
and her wire-haired dog to sniff
and nuzzle at every give opportunity
watches from the end of the couch
while words succumb to the *smack smack*
of lips on lips, and fingers numb
from the pull of elastic search below
and two thighs part like magic, and shivering,
the dog does not once divert his gaze.
And later: smoking hashish on the back
of a number eleven bus on the way
to the game with Fulham, whose fans
can't fight for fuck, and calling the driver
twat behind his back, and spilling
Carling Black Label all over Roy Mitchell's
bovver boots, and getting so drunk
you can't even watch the match.
And down the Job Center rubbing shoulders
with soon-to-be-mothers and coughing
old scruff-bags bent over forms, and later,
waiting on the Embankment, watching
the Thames slide by. Black brown barges
making their way up towards Putney
and out towards the Isle of Dogs
churn black brown smoke into the drizzle
then disappear.

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